

The SOUND Projector 4

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and Rastafarianism

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The man who scored GODZILLA

Live: Pere Ubu.

Suicide, Electronicage

AMM Sandwich
The original and best
Farmers Manual

Release Your Mind

The Phantom of Liberty
Derek Bailey, Paul Rutherford,
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Fushitsusha
A Death never to be complete

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The Sound Projector Fourth Issue



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Back Issues

Number One THE MICROWAVE MANUAL

Number Two BETTER LISTENING THRO IMAGINATION

Number Three TOO MANY CDS

If you send £10 you get all three back issues post free. Otherwise they cost £3.50 each, incl. postage. Overseas orders add more for postage please.

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Skipload of Tapes Competition 2

War Arrow writes: Having been inundated with literally NO entries to last Skipload's competition, we are able to offer a special rollover jackpot prize this time around. For the record, the answers to our previous three questions were 'carrot', 'The Fall', and 'Coatlucue' (although 'Don't Know' would have been acceptable for the last one). To recap the extremely complicated rules, all that is asked of you is answers for the following questions sent to the editorial address and clearly marked Skipload of Tapes Competition. The winner (the first person to supply the correct answers, or more likely the first person who can be bothered to write in) receives a pile of over 20 cassettes, as reviewed in the last three issues of *The Sound Projector*. Come on, some of them may not be up to much, but most of them are good. Enter today, you cheeky monkey!

1. On the back cover of Kraftwerk's 1973 album *Ralf and Florian*, which member of the group is wearing spectacle?
2. In 1979 The Residents suggested that 'warm clothing and a blanket should be within easy reach', but under what circumstances?
3. What rather naughty act is Aztec (or more accurately Mexica) emperor Itzcoatl (1427-1440) said to have perpetrated with regards to the screenfold books of his people?

Late Additional notes

Disconnected Bliss by Ask is available mail order from DISCUS or from FOURTH DIMENSION in the UK, and through ELECTRONIC MUSIC FOUNDATION worldwide. Emanem CDS are available from Martin Davidson, 3 Bittacy Rise, London NW7 2HH

Our Motto... 'The Ace of Spades means Death!'

The Fall @ Camden Dingwalls 27th & 28th April 1998

WITH MOST OF THE BAND having walked out just days before following a tempestuous US tour and Mark E. Smith's arrest for alleged assault, the Fall performed their short residency at Dingwalls as a three piece consisting of Smith, a new drummer and sole remaining member Julia on keys and guitar. I half-expected to be witness to a sad Shane

MacGowan-type farce but Mark E seemed to take the band's most drastic membership upheaval yet almost in his stride. Stripping the songs down to their bare bones, but as always playing with the material and moulding it into new shapes (even rearranging songs from one night to the next), their performances were triumphant.

The last time The Fall played Dingwalls in Sept 97 they tore the place up with 'OI' Gang', Julia banging out two electric piano notes and the band filling the sound out into a brilliant rock'n'roll number which persistently and thrillingly teetered on the edge of chaos. This time no such arrangement was possible, so Julia changed it almost beyond recognition into an edgy cathedral organ piece. A similar workover was given to the scrappily-produced Light User Syndrome track 'Powderkeg'. Already transformed in a remix by Pete Waterman associates DOSE, who ripped out the best moments of the song and set them amongst an eerie framework of bleeps, it was taken one step further live as the band played over a tape of the DOSE version, adding disorientating atmospheric effects - the first time I've ever been disturbed by a Fall song.

Similarly new life was breathed into old faves like 'Hip Priest' as they were given drastic overhauls. Not all of the arrangements worked: backing tapes on some tracks rendered some of the performances redundant and at times uncertainty showed in the band's playing. MES's penchant for

throwing spanners in the works in order to keep his musicians on their toes was ever present, creating some exciting if unpredictable dynamics. Smith added some improv guitar noise, brought Michael Clark on stage to recite prose pieces, hauled the band off stage when he thought they were going off the rails and on one occasion handed a guitar to a member of the audience who enthusiastically leapt on stage and played along for a track.

I don't want to dwell on MES's stage idiosyncracies. Most of them are well documented by now and yet still seem to mystify even hardened Fall fans, some of who appear to be as narrow-minded about what constitutes live entertainment as a Wet Wet Wet fan. True, I've often thought that the Fall could be a lot more powerful if they tightened up their sound and focused their act just ever so. However, few outfits would have the guts to attempt what Mark and Julia did on these nights, even fewer the imagination and ability to pull it off.

HARLEY RICHARDSON



Pere Ubu @ The Queen Elizabeth Hall, South Bank London 5th April 1998

MOST SANE PEOPLE OUGHT TO own a copy of this year's *Pennsylvania* CD or they've probably got a screw loose someplace. It's been over 20 years since the first Pere Ubu LP and purists say only the (mostly unrecorded) period with Peter Laughner is any good anyway. How wrong can you get? Turns out David Thomas is only a musical-director genius of the stature of Captain Beefheart; Pere Ubu (in whatever incarnation) could not exist without his vision. And he's also a mystical social commentator for this century of the first water. I need only direct your eye to yellow road signs floating above the stage, in amongst the stage-set Claes Oldenburg / Robert Rauschenberg clutter and paraphernalia. 'BE ALERT', says one, 'AVOID TRITE AND UNNECESSARY TALK' the other. A flying washing machine watched the band with its one good eye; the domestic nightmare of 'The Book is On The Table' was made a concrete reality. Thomas has fetched back debris from his extensive tours of the United States, including the exhaust filter from the *Pennsylvania* cover propped up next to a Flying V Gibson guitar. Humble road and shop signs, as with the best and underrated Pop Art (fuck Roy Lichtenstein!) have been examined and found to contain hidden meanings to life, secret poetic symbols, and added to a musical brew to fuck up your mind as potent as the 'secret throat medicine' Thomas swigged periodically on stage. Here also are fragments of anecdotes, some woven into the songs, some delivered as monologues, limning Thomas' broad canvas on which are depicted some of the stranger backwaters of the wonders of life in This Here America. 'From the beginning geography has been part of the vocabulary of our music'. Glimpses of the Elvis Death Commemoration Week at Memphis in 'Turquoise Fins', a song concluding with a catalogue of surrealist kitschy tourist postcards ('a rabbit with antlers ... chickens on a fire engine') all marked Return To Sender. And people waste their time listening to Garrison Keillor!

No nostalgia trip, but original guitarist Tom Herman is the

only other original surviving member here. On final song, a brief duetting between Robert Wheeler's stuttering Theremin and Thomas' horn-pipe was permitted, conjuring up all the early Ubu mayhem that you or I (who never made it to Cleveland or CBGBs in the mid 1970s) could have wished for ... radio samples dropped in, to complete a transcendent moment, transparent, right there on stage. Yet what could compare with the note-perfect version of 'Chinese Radiation' at the start of the event, only second song in and here's that haunting slow piano chord sequence to frighten your soul back to the cellar ... with Thomas breaking in to provide a footnote explanation of the lyrics, nuclear bomb testing radiation cloud reportedly spread over Cleveland, which at that time was the second largest politically Maoist-oriented location anywhere after China. A perfect form of revenge, the nuclear bomb always gets to the right targets somehow. Now, how many people are able to make connections like this? - From raw facts, something unutterably strange is fashioned.

Another clue to long-term inmates of the Ubu cell - the song 'My friend is a stooge of the media priests'. Datapanik is thus first blamed on the inane weather reporters on TV in Chicago in the mid-1970s. This began the chain of events that corrupted the meaning of all information, trivialising it through the filter of the 'media priests' of which we are all (not just his friend) are stooges. 'A state of data overload exists in which information will only function as a sedative-like drug; a dependent culture is inevitable in which nothing can be true.'



This festival was the last day in a four-day DisastoDrome event conceived by Thomas. The original DisastoDrome was organised in the 1970s by John Thompson (aka Johnny Dromette) in Cleveland, for which detail we need only refer to the back cover of *390 Degrees of Simulated Stereo*. John opened the gig and told his story; back then, he had been humiliated by performers and paying public alike, but it spurred him on to assist with bigger and even greater disasters. The QEH Lobby was filled with further strange sculpture collisions, and interactive gear too - computer units demonstrating a prototype Pere Ubu CD-ROM. This country's own DisastoDrome (look ye to Greenwich, gentle Londoner) was namechecked and exposed for the ridicule it is, and what price Datapanik in the year Zero when year 2000 attacks your precious Apple Mac?

**AVOID TRITE
AND
UNNECESSARY
TALK** ... I wish more people could live by that one.



LONG FUCKING OVERDUE The need for aural blastage of my dusty brain that is...four sell out gigs in London of which this was but a one. It's been 20 years since the first Suicide LP and even that was rumoured to have caught them a little too late. What price this appearance? even given Rev's creditable solo one-hander at Disobey some two years before. Aye, your sceptical 37 year-old geek reviewer in the audience was all prepared for a dismal showing but instead had his balls rocked off mightily. The duo walked on arm in arm, a sexual ambivalent prelude to the night of pure libido, a cabaret styled Amsterdam sex show that shows up virtually any stupid UK electro ripoff duo for the vapid Chelsea poseurs that they were - Marc Almond and his non-stop erotic cabaret, preening their inadequate two-inch willies, authentic queers Erasure, Depeche Mode, Cabaret Voltaire... Alan Vega and Marty Rev give us the full anal penetration works with their mighty throbbing 18-inch erections. Chain-smoking Vega struts about the stage like a veteran of Pigalle, vibrating with pure charisma, stage presence, and raw attitude, spitting out four-letter words. Rev unleashes pure electric mayhem of unacceptable deciblage of such utter primitivism that makes the first Suicide LP seem cluttered, overly conceptual. Even if you had no ears, you'da been transfixed by their moves; you could have drunk in their pure STYLE like so much 80 proof vodka. And they were clearly enjoying every minute of it, so what more do you want?

What the fuck it all proves - I don't even care. Yr London drum'n'bass dance crowd enjoyed every minute, one in five in the audience bopping like yoyos to the extreme volume and red flashing lights like any other night at the Ministry (visually and aurally, it was like being plunged into an open beating heart). Yr specky intellectuals had one thoughtful finger surgically attached to their lower lips hours before the gig and adopted a striking pose at the front row. A knot of die-hard mosh pitters brought throbbing life to the floor for a 96 Tears-Sister Ray encore. All hands on deck are thus equally satisfied, like any able crew members of the US Navy - the only boys who know what's good when it comes to a bit of nice, clean round-eye.

Weirdly, I'd have been satisfied with the 40-minutes of intense minimal torture that Panasonic inflicted on us earlier in the evening...an experience that provoked much the same reactions as above, only less so. Part of their shtick is that Panasonic don't project any humanity through body language, facial expressions, or any other organic functions associated with a living being; but the machines speak for them, as does a screen projected with a visual readout of their diabolical de-programmed, real-time machinations. Hateful and infused with an evil, lotus-eating bliss that only the strongest stomachs can handle.

Personally I'm glad my companions dragged me down to the front of the stage so I could miss not a single detail in the eye of the storm, even the perverts licking up flecks of Alan Vega's sweat from the stage before Russell Haswell

could draw his black safety curtain across; but Paul Smith thoughtfully delivered a benison to that frantic faithful one. This gig will stay with me for some time, believers. Signing off at 1.05 am ... get a good night's sleep now.

**Suicide
Live @ The
Garage,
Friday 6th
March 1998**

THE SECOND IN AN EXCITING series of concerts organised by Alquimia and Peter Cusack at The Spitz. Nice to see this large bill in such an intimate setting, with equipment spilling into the audience.

Sanderson (toys), Durrant (violin) and Hackett (synthesizers) began the evening with a fascinating descent into spiritual fetishism, sweeping chords and pitch bend from Hackett augmented by sparks of adolescent ecstasy from Sanderson and alternate shrieks of bat energy and undulating horse whispers from Durrant. An abrasive, challenging opener grounded in the organicism of Durrant's volume control, which bridged a violent defenestration.

Alquimia's windswept voice was next, mingling pleasantly if occasionally with her baby grand piano treatments with Cusack offering staccato bazouki renderings tuned and detuned while Cutler, with blinding alacrity, may have treated his skins to marbles, fans, and rolled-up pieces of cloth while operating an electronicage of his own that seemed to be connected to every facet of his kit, which looked like a patient hooked to an electroencephalogram.

The mysterious zoviet*france were next, a nice slither into the nether evening where end of day hostility gives way to primordial comfort and transcendental luxury. One DJ provided beats while two others crouched behind some alien laboratory, ringing bells and whispering sweet nothings that were swept around the room like a laughing ghost, as hypnotic and alluring as a Bunuel segue, also a most palatable aftermath to the jazz frenzy of the previous groups.

DJ Modulus and Steve Teers gave the three singularly different acts a rare cohesion, serving to accentuate the interactive environment with a blend of familiar and oblique sights and sounds.

While I don't pretend to understand the technology at work here, it's worth noting that all three bands were at the top of their form in blending electronics with acoustic instruments and voice. An exquisite range of effects blended with an equally

Electronicage @ The Spitz

London, 15 October 1997

**:Zoviet*france - Alquimia - Peter Cusack - Chris Cutler -
Richard Sanderson - Phil Durrant - Martin Hackett
Live video mix by Stephen Teers DJ Morpheus**



arresting variety of instruments to create an atmosphere that ranged from hostile to tranquil as the evening crept to conclusion. I left feeling I'd witnessed a very important, if not historic, meeting of styles; with confidence that these type of shows will someday

supplant the tour-grind sterility that haunts the current club circuit worldwide.

CUT 'n' PASTE!

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Some merry pranksters here whose evident glee in their patchwork sonic craft summons up the image of Dr Frankenstein - or rather Baron Francesco Napoleon Stein, as rendered by the great original MAD cartoonist, Bill Elder. A demonic draughtsman, Elder produced countless mind-searing images which I'll carry to the grave, but for the time being I only direct you to the drawing of the good Doctor seated at his 'Stinker' sewing machine, stitching together a hideous pelt of dead human flesh. 'LA-TA TEE-DA!' With this Texas Chainsaw massacre stuff, Elder came as close as he could to expressing the nightmare of Ed Gein on paper more than once in his life - and (worryingly) did it in front of a mass audience with nobody cottoning on to his little game ...

Francis Dhomont, *Frankenstein Symphony*
New York, Asphodel. 0978 (1998)

Excellent and enjoyable instrumental noise-burst from this modern concretist. Francis Dhomont is a veteran French-Canadian electro-acoustic burgermeister who has fashioned 'a hybrid thing in four movements made of cut-up pieces, pasted assembled and sewed parts that are alike and contrasting'. Perhaps it was inevitable that we'd get a stitched-together collage record named for the Frankenstein 'monster' - thankfully this Symphony is nothing so corny as atmospheric sound effects (eg creaky doors, howling gales and electrical storms) to build your own automaton by. Instead, these sounds explore an inner space, the very workings of the poor patchwork man himself. A rich combination of intestinal gurglings ('the stomach of the beast

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created') express the physical dimensions, and chaotic passages of samples suggest the frenetic brain activity of the creature - including fragmented 'memory' bursts. Don't forget the monster (as portrayed in Hollywood by Boris Karloff) was created with a criminal brain. This film, the 1932 James Whale interpretation of *Frankenstein* is to my mind the best vision of Mary Shelley's original nightmare - reading her original story yields but a pallid experience, as though she herself couldn't face the horrors her imagination had conjured up. Dhomont never denies a narrative sequence to the unfolding of the disc - there feels like a definite shift from the interior to the exterior world, from claustrophobia to wide open spaces under an unforgiving, empty grey sky. But that's just this listener - this disc is abstract enough to map out your own fantasies and neuroses, which is surely not a bad thing. The works of some 22 composers were sampled and utilised, including some of Dhomont's own students from his Revox 'n' Magitape night classes - including such names as Stephane Roy and Robert Normandeau and many others whose work is known on the Diffusion i Media label.

Christian Marclay, *More Encores* ReR, CM1 (1997)

An underground hero, Marclay is to many the undisputed king of avant-garde turntabling - here's a record where he never plays a single note on a musical instrument, but samples old vinyl - layering together a selection of short moments from records, 'mixed and manipulated on multiple turntables and recorded analogue with the use of overdubbing'. He uses classical music and opera (Strauss, Chopin, Maria Callas), free improv (Fred Frith, John Zorn), Easy listening (Martin Denny, Ferrante and Teicher) as well as Hendrix, John Cage, Louis Armstrong and Serge Gainsbourg. At first it may seem like a massacre, a hideous conflagration as your favourite blasts from the past all go up in smoke, dragged unwillingly to Marclay's shrine of burnt offerings. Even his own records aren't safe, sacrificed on the final track! But lo and behold - a Phoenix rises from the ashes, and it is a new work of art; not even music necessarily, but a rethinking and remodelling of it; a conceptual bubble issuing from the head of a futuristic dreamer.

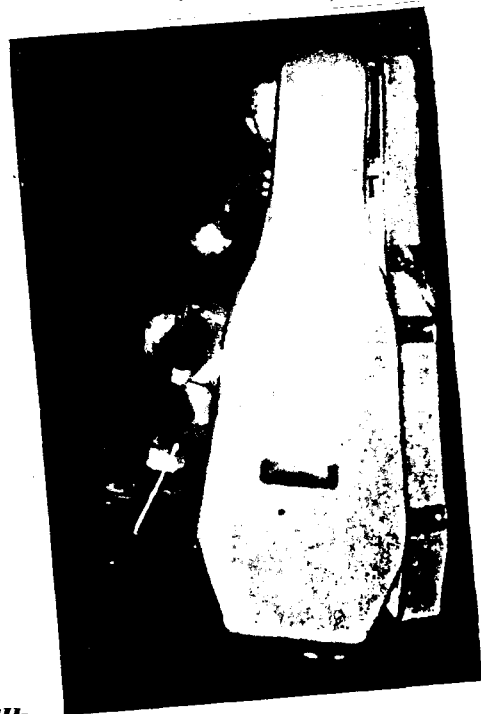
Try a few more listens. Perhaps it isn't so destructive a process after all! There's nothing random about it; he's focussing in on the best moments, the 'Seconds of Pleasure' that make listening to records so enjoyable, releasing those genies from their bottles, homing in on the areas of most intense emotion as expressed through sound. This is the work of a man who knows those discs well - maybe not necessarily loving them, but so familiar with the ins and outs of every groove he has no need of the white chalk favoured by DJs to indicate their cue marks (a trick the young Frank Zappa borrowed when he wanted to annoy his friends with his Varese record). I read about, but never heard, a Psychic TV experiment involving a tape collage of selected 'high emotional states' captured on tape - one example being a cheering or applauding crowd. The cumulative effect of hearing so much psychic energy released at one time would be to drive the listener mad, or make him want to join Thee Temple. Or both. Be that as it be, Marclay seems more sensitive to the needs of the listener in terms of providing a vital, music-based experience, one that somehow simultaneously withholds and bestows the usual pleasures we associate with music.

Then again, maybe he does hate records. He has a history of wreaking a violent revenge on the very physical material of

vinyl. 'Recorded sound is dead sound', according to Marclay. On a record, the music is embalmed; only by cutting it up can he bring it back to life. One favoured method is the pie-slice technique, gluing together mismatching pieces of shattered / cut records, completely rearranging the music. *Record Without a Cover* was exactly that; issued with no sleeve so that the trauma each copy suffered in its progress through the world would enhance the record, and make it unique. An art gallery installation (in Zurich, 1989) saw the entire floor covered with 3,500 copies of a record, called *Footsteps* aptly enough as the viewers were required to walk all over this installation, like it or not. In fact, *Footsteps* was a record Marclay had made himself (of people walking in a deserted clocktower in New York). When the visitors had finished scuffing the copies with their feet, they had contributed to the final item - clicks, scratches and recorded footsteps 'blended in a final aleatory composition of rhythmic patterns'.

Marclay's a real original, of whom Japan's Otomo Yoshihide is at least one obvious spiritual inheritor. Another would have to be the Canadian Plunderphonic fellow, John Oswald. But Oswald seems more of a nihilist somehow, fuelled by his sense of personal frustration with the barriers imposed by any form of composed music, his response has been to try and tear it all down rather than build anything new. But we can forgive him this, as he makes such interesting music most of the time.

Originally released as a very nice 10" LP in 1988 by No Man's Land in Germany. Here's a CD issue to introduce you all to the pure Dada fun and mayhem of Marclay.



Elk, *Elk* Switzerland, Sadke Productions mini-CD. 97/01 (1997)

Bo Wiget played two hours worth of cello improvisations only to have them processed through an audio computer by one Christoph Camenzind and condensed into this pretty enjoyable 20-minute slablette. But this ain't just edited highlights - rather it's been composed and structured into a sonata form, in three movements no less. This becomes especially effective when some white noise is layered into the mix - one could conceive it to be Bo unplugging his

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pickup lead, unless it was some other recording 'fault' incorporated into the improvisation. Although the first 'movement' might eventually become irritating with a rather corny repeated descendo bass-swoop, the second manages to render itself into a disembodied pale drone minestrone soup, a comforting experience which was the very cheering broth my heart required before facing another wet Saturday morning in my usual quest for fresh bread. Bo Wiget was formerly in bands Spot the Loony and The Dying Hedgehog; he has sawed his device on many performance mats in Europe and Japan, has several Jap buddy-collaborators and is working on an 'Ambient project' with Luigi Archetti, the Italian 6-string serial killer - who is one half of Tiere Der Nacht and also appeared in the improv band Affront Perdu with Bo and another improviser, M Gantenbein. Producer Sara Keel's Sadke label is a return to the 'We're small enough to care' ethos of the early 1980s - they plan to issue one release per year.

Sadke Productions, PO Box 11, CH 1702, Fribourg, Switzerland

Rapoon, *The Fires of the Borderlands* USA, Release, RR 6978-2 (1998)

Rapoon is Robin Storey's solo venture since he left Zoviet*France in 1992. Now there's a band we should all be investigating more, if their performance at The Spitz in 1997 was anything to go by - and assuming your principle desire in life is to be wrapped in a vast vibrating electric blanket. The guys doing this adopted a low-profile approach to performing which may have influenced Panasonic at least; their appearance of doing nothing at all with their mysterious black-box electrical devices, an impression completely

contradicted by the dense seeping energies slowly pouring towards you like so much green ectoplasm.

Storey has found it liberating to shake off the Zoviet*France mantle and pursue his own mystical, rhythm based minimal mind-trips. Again, the simplicity prevails - for records *Easterly 6 or 7* (on Staalplaat) and *Darker by Light*, it seems he restricted himself to using a four-track recorder with effects processor, keyboards and drums. These records hint at interesting ethnical music elements, especially Indian music (tabla and oud samples), and a certain spiritual questing in line with the trance-like state Storey finds it necessary to enter to play this music.

The Fires of the Borderlands explores that spiritual dimension yet further. To put it mildly, it sounds like the best of Popol Vuh played using jet engines for speakers - there's that exhilarating rush to it, quite at odds with the leisurely pace with which this stately sound proceeds. Florian Fricke liked Indian music too - he released an entire LP of Indian classical music for sitar and tabla, called *Yoga*. Here, I think Storey has looped and sampled old records including perhaps some classical opera recordings - everything is treated until it's completely unfocussed, the original heart of the extract beating like a micro-organism inside a new cell structure. A truly meditative record, a richly rewarding music that deserves at least a Terry Riley tribute to its very holiness!

**See over for a short interview
with Robin Storey (4/4/98) →**

Thomas Dimuzio, *Headlock* ReR TD1 (1998)

Exhilarating and spacey chaos noise, fashioned from a junkyard. Dimuzio, one of a new school of Musique Concretists, sampled just about anything and everything he could lay his paws on, unsurprisingly gravitating towards items which one does not associate with music: his shopping list of samples is a grotesque mixture of names, imaginary quantities, personal in-jokes and actual materials, and includes 'kitchen pipes, Jim Reed, Po-Po, feedback, water, found objects, 10 speed bicycle, AM radio, Davlarv's car, woodshop, Thermos cap, Lion's Park playground, Banoodle, Kish, Babs, Patronized Humoplasms' ... the list goes on. The whole CD is pretty awe-inspiring, kind of like an abstract doom-laden progressive rock LP without songs or melodies. Even if you can only manage the first track 'Inherent Power and the Space Between' you will go to the

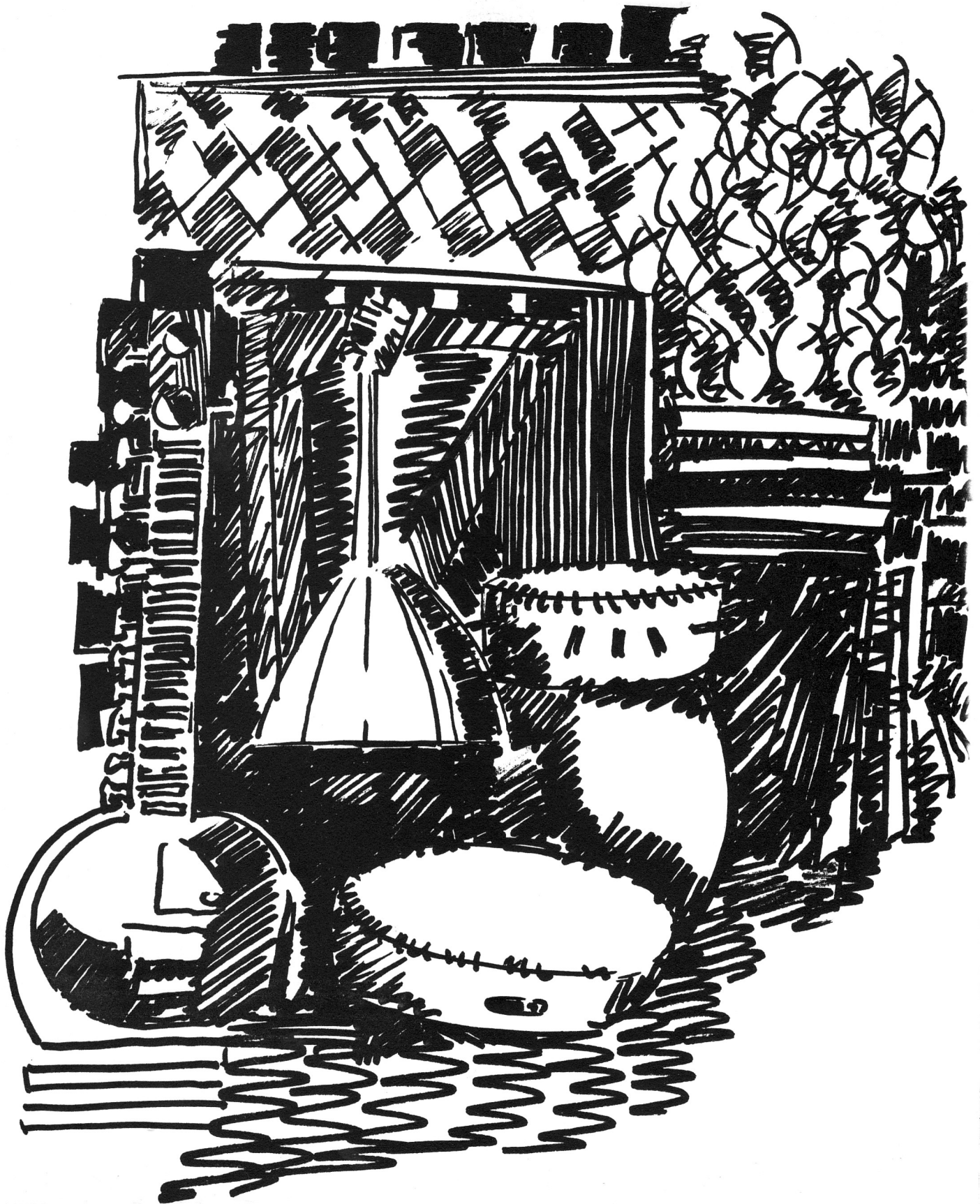


grave greatly enriched in spirit; it's like a nightmare parody of heavy metal with insane howling monkeys behind the controls. Unlike a pure noise-merchant of Merzbow's stripe, Dimuzio is interested in more than just a series of intolerable overtones and textures; there is a sense of controlled random power that is almost Surrealist in spirit,

and he can summon up sensations of blind terror at the flick of a switch, almost as a by-product. This item is a reissue and remastering by the artist of a recording made in 1989 at Gench studios. Besides his solo efforts, Dimuzio has worked within a clique of familiar names that includes Chris Cutler, Fred Frith, the ROVA Saxophone Quartet, the 5UUs, and Tom Cora. There have been live performances of solo events, where the man has unleashed his monstrous set-ups - interactive systems of samplers and processors - on the unwilling public at free music festivals in America and Europe. *Markoff Process* (on RRRecords) is an issue

that documents some of these theatrical dramas of madness, and should probably be given to young minds who find they are not dreaming enough, or only dreaming in black and white ... 'Wake up from that dream young one for you don't know what they want you to think'.

Robin Storey



It should be played to the whole world

The Sound Projector Fourth Issue

Is it true there might be a spiritual dimension to the music of The Fires of the Borderlands?

Yes - only I don't belabour the point. From the press releases, people now expect me to be wearing a hair shirt and chanting all day, which isn't true. It is necessary to enter a sort of trance when playing, only not in a contrived way. If the music's doing something, I'll follow it; if not, the piece won't go any further. When a piece is first beginning, I'll see if it holds my attention, whether it will open out and suggest other possibilities. Everything's inherent in the music. It doesn't happen very often! The process is something personal, but I can't elaborate any further. I wouldn't say it's anything particularly unique to me.

In a way this goes back to the very beginnings of when I decided to do music instead of art, because I was fed up with the institutionalisation of art. The only objective of Art College, it seemed to me, was to beat any originality or creativity out of you. I started getting involved in music through hearing Stockhausen. The idea of providing written directions to the musicians, instead of conventionally scored sheet music, was interesting - for example, 'Think of a sound and hear it before you start playing it'. At Art College I met other people who felt the same. We formed a trio and performed some Stockhausen piano pieces at a concert hall. We were dressed in formal gear with dicky bows and had these Bosendorfer grand pianos!

This was at Sunderland Art College, about 1973-1977 when I was studying there. There was a loosely-described 'Experimental' course, and I started doing music there because there was a less rigorous approach than on the painting side. Music was one of the options. A good teacher had been brought in - Dave Pinder. He was a modern electronic composer. He played me lots of stuff I'd never heard. At the same time, I was getting into the German Rock scene, hearing Can, Cluster and Neu! Of course, a lot of those bands had been influenced by, or worked with, Stockhausen anyway - like Holger Czukay. When I heard *Canaxis-5* it was an inspiration - that's still a favourite record. I felt I was going completely away from my previous musical tastes - well not completely away, because I still liked most of Frank Zappa. *Hot Rats* was the first LP I ever bought. A lot of Zappa's music still stands up, but I think he was difficult to work with - a bit of a tartar for getting it right!

Are you still interested in visual art?

Well, I still paint, but it took me a long time after leaving Art School before I got into it again. They didn't understand what I wanted to do at Sunderland. The situation became very antagonistic - on both sides. Eventually they pulled the plug on me! I'd completed two years worth of musical work, which at the time I'd been told would be acceptable towards the final degree. Then they changed their minds. I found I had only three months to put together enough work for a visual show. I almost said 'Sod it' and gave up altogether. But then I got into print-making, especially etching and lithography - because I could do it fast. The print tutor showed me how I could produce stuff quickly, and I still like print-making today - I love all the smells in a print workshop! So yes, I eventually got my degree, but it didn't feel at all satisfactory.

It was a very weird situation at Sunderland - they tried to get me thrown off the course, on grounds of morality! I'm still not sure how it all came about. There was one guy who had been a Deputy Head and suddenly was promoted to Head of the entire School. This guy really had it in for me, I think. To him, the Christian Faith was everything; and so I got into an argument with him one day at one of the subsidiary subject classes, where I spoke against the conventional idea of God -

that there wasn't this bearded gentleman living in the sky! And so they tried to chuck me out - because I didn't believe in God! Looking back, it felt like some horrible story that Philip K. Dick might have written. The total absurdity of it.

There's a Newcastle-based painter I still like - Kirill Sokolov, he's a Russian guy, in his late 60s, he's a good friend. His work is as important as anyone else's. He has shows all over the world. He was born in Stalinist Russia, and when he left the country the documentation got lost, so he's not sure precisely how old he is. We met at a print-making workshop. He paints 300 pictures a week - literally! He said the percentage of good ones goes up, the more paintings you do - so maybe out of 300 paintings about 10 or 15 percent will be really good.

Do you prefer abstract art?

I've gone both ways on that. At one time I didn't understand abstract art at all - I just couldn't see it. Then, through my friends at Art College, a blindfold came off. These two friends of mine were doing some Post Abstract-Expressionist stuff - the same people I did the music with. So through playing music with them, I found I could understand the abstract art. Then, at one time I declared there was no point at all in painting realistic stuff! - but I've come back to accepting figurative art, mainly through Kirill.

Your sleeve art for Borderlands hints at a knowledge of early art and symbolism...

I don't deliberately nick other images for my paintings. A lot of them evolved like the music - found objects were used. I like symbols. You put them in a painting without knowing what they are, and later you find out they're centuries old, and come from all different cultures. The collective subconsciousness - that interests me. There's a lot of it in music too. A lot of musical phrases could have come from almost anywhere. You hear a piece of early Chinese music, and some of the phrases there could be taken from Irish music. It doesn't even have to be played on any particular instrument. The more ancient and original a music is, the more common elements are there.

It's true there's a certain snobbery and elitism creeping into the Western attitude towards ethnic music, which can dismiss other cultures. On the other hand, I have very mixed feelings about this music being plundered. In today's scene, where ethnic music is often sampled on records, in a lot of cases it's merely being used as a novelty aspect. It sort of cheapens the music. There's no respect for the culture. Florian Fricke, on the other hand - yes, there is more integrity in his work. *Hosianna Mantra* - that's a perfectly beautiful album, and I like all the Werner Herzog movie music too.

One thing that knocked my socks off was a piece of music I saw on a TV programme. It was in China, in the 1970s; western camera crews were going in, but there was an embargo on what they could and could not film. So this piece I saw was covert filming, and it was smuggled out of the country. They found this old hermit living up this mountain. He played this piece of music - it was something that was not supposed to be heard, it should be played to the whole world. He was 70 years old, he played it on this two-string banjo-like instrument, and it was utterly and totally incredible. That music was about 3,000 years old. It lasted about four minutes and it was perfection. Luckily, I have it on tape. I reckon Mozart was probably a genius, but hearing that Chinese hermit - the Western perception of genius was made to look a bit silly.

As you are now ... so once was I

**Fushitsusha, *A Death Never to be Complete*
Tokyo, Tokuma Japan Communications,
TKCF-77014 (1997)**

I frequently wish I was dead, which is probably why I love Haino's music so much. I never stop wanting to be dead. The black sleeve art is a visual and conceptual constant Haino has never departed from. With each release emanating through commercial networks, a funereal chain is garlanded about the globe; little slices of emptiness inhabit the racks of record shops, existential voids brooding like black holes among the gaudy, colourful come-and-get-me fripperies of reissued jazz and psych rarities. The Spinal Tap black sleeve joke came true; it seems nobody wants to mention this as it seems so naff, but remember the two things they say about the all-black cover to *Smell the Glove!* 'You can see yourself in it...both sides...' and 'Every movie in the world today is about death. Death sells'. If you doubt the latter sentiment, then explain to me why is every man-jack of us so keen to watch a load of Irish steerage-class idiots being drowned to death in the freezing waters of the Atlantic ocean in James Cameron's ludicrous movie *Titanic*? As to the former, you don't need a black sleeve or a silver CD to act as a false looking-glass, a warlock's magic mirror. With Keiji Haino's music, you can see yourself in it both sides, both sides of yourself, the positive and the negative, but especially the negative, or more precisely the dangerous and unknowable side of humanity that (in this age of promiscuous, superficial and forced happiness) everyone pretty much ignores. It's a glimpse of the dark brother that Harry Partch (through a Thomas Wolfe short story) urged us to make a friend of; as has Captain Beefheart in his best moments: 'Friends don't mind just how you grow...', he belted out on 'Electricity'. And again: 'Why doncha quit your cool tomfoolery, and shed yer nasty jewellery!' Remove the vain trappings of your ego, and look...

Despite this blackness, the blackness which speaks of a hollowness, a hollowness in my own empty life ... this music might yet redeem us. I'm So Hollow were an indie band who made a record pressed in transparent vinyl, which is a gimmick Haino should never try as his music is far more opaque. The opaqueness comes from his own humanity, the same richness that makes a Velasquez canvas so rich and dark, the very blood of life-being poured into the mixture. He makes the guitar sing like it sings, not through playing it with his hands alone but by throwing his entire body at it; an elaborate series of performance-art body moves make that hunk of wood and steel perform like it never has done before. Like the fable of the potter who only attained the longed-for red glaze on his vases when he threw his own body into the final firing. (Solution: he unknowingly got it first time because a pig had accidentally fallen into the kiln. Blood had produced the red glaze). Haino reclaims the spirituality of music through his body. He knows the agony and the sheer drudgery of art, that there are no short cuts

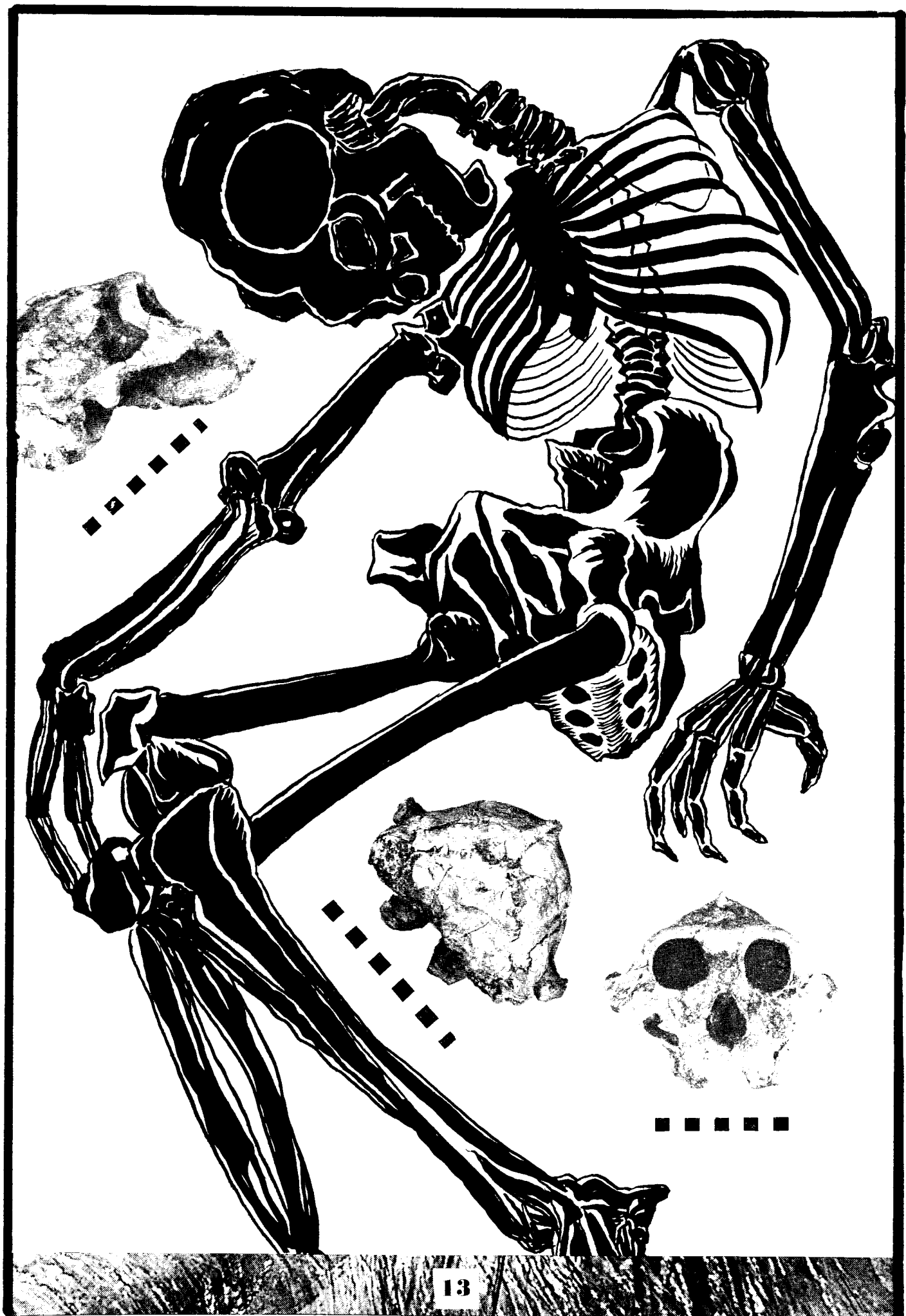
to creating this music. Despite yearning to die with every fibre of his being, he has to go on living anyway. Why has religion never provided a workable answer to this dilemma? We're told is that suicide is a crime, a mortal sin...like they say, it's against Roman law to take one own's life; the penalty's death. Ha ha.

'Don't kill yourself', a friend urged me. 'We'll all die anyway, so what's the point?' Okay then, so at least stay alive long enough to listen to this one disc, even if you use it as a funeral dirge in your lonely little room lit with black and white candles while you sit there with the blood slowly draining from your wrists. Draw succour and compassion from this London studio recording, wherein three of the basic modes of Haino expression are amply demonstrated, with the help of his bassist Yashushi Ozawa and drummer Jun Kosugi. Mode 1 - an anti-social, brooding knot of constipated bass-heavy growls and groans, stopping and starting like a dying grizzly bear who refuses to accept he's been pumped full of exploding shotgun cartridges into his heart. Mode 2 - unbearably painful wailing chorus, wherein the androgynous Keiji strips off every vestige of his maleness and becomes a parade of historical classical women, an eternal Greek chorus of wailing maidens in black, T S Eliot's Sibyll hanging in a cage crying 'I wish to die'. He need only lightly caress his guitar with ghostly fingers to make it howl in sympathy. Mode 3 - the tough no-nonsense avant heavy metal meister, wiping the brain clean of any sentimental guff with earth-shattering swathes of pure, cleansing electronic noise - caustic soda for your cerebellum. Be warned that many of the pieces here will combine any of these three in a number of unexpected combinations, thanks to the gift of tape editing, and pure Haino genius ... there are in addition many sublime moments where he is simply playing amplifier hum through the pedal effects boards, thickening the atmosphere, suggesting the sulphurous air he breathes that might be poisonous to you or I is like pure oxygen to his capillaries ... tread carefully.

Haven't we all been through that death never to be complete? It's a living hell and a living heaven. It is the resurrection - Christ himself knew everything there is to know about the death never to be complete. He probably made his own body sing like an instrument, vibrating with the very hunk of wood he was nailed onto. The vibrations he set up continue to this day, much as you (dear unbelieving reader) would probably like to ignore them. A continuous death ... we 'crucify him daily', as John Donne wrote. Haino produces painful but necessary music, a sound that corresponds to an inner human vibration of pure negativity, or perhaps it's pure love, something palpable and true that needs to be felt and dealt with, not ignored. Friendships and relationships are, I believe, in the long run extremely destructive - the emotion sucks you into a vortex, from which you will inevitably emerge with less than you had at the start, perhaps even nothing at all. It will even ruin the friendships and the little happiness you had before you entered. If you dare to face such unpalatable truths, honestly and continuously, then you can only be Keiji Haino. And you will be utterly and completely alone!

Loneliness forever and the earth again! Dark brother and stern friend, immortal face of darkness and of night, with whom the half-part of my life was spent, and with whom I shall abide now until my death forever - what is there for me to fear as long as you are with me? - Thomas Wolfe, God's Lonely Man

*Oh My Black soule! now thou art summoned / By sickness, death's herald, and champion...
- John Donne, Holy Sonnets IV*



The Sound Projector Fourth Issue

Various Artists, *Extreme Music from Japan*

Edinburgh. Susan Lawly. SLCD008 (1994)

Whew! Finally caught up with a copy of this one, some four years old but still a killer collection of exclusive recordings and a useful primer to some of the more poisonous and vicious entrepreneurs of Eastern Volume Torture Experiments. Compiled by Susan Lawly after 'two years of invitations and extensive audition reports...in collaboration with Shunya Suzuki in Japan'. Where the Virgin comp *Cosmic Kurushi Monsters* tried to meet us rockist listeners halfway with guitar bands and singers, this comp takes no prisoners.

Inevitably, here's tracks by Merzbow and Masonna, the Gargantua and Pantagruel of JapNoise core - and exceptionally fatal ones they are too. Masonna is the emperor of overloaded voice treatments, capable of generating ferocious roars with a microphone inserted deep into his gaping gullet, to feed terrifying screams and howls through waves of distortion into an amplifier cranked up to illegal levels. Way beyond excess, his tracks 'Eat Maggot' and 'Anne' are tempered with sudden edits of plangent echoey guitar episodes, chimes from an underground chapel, surfacing at random only to be wiped clean by the incoming tidal wave of his voice.

Other contributors include Incapacitants with a splendid installment of bile called 'No Discount', displaying mind-twisting digital delay experiments far wilder than Butthole Surfers and their 'Gibbytronix' ever imagined, plus Government Alpha, HijoKaidan, Hentaitenno, The Gerogerigegege, and What A Smell. Each maniac fiend generates their own special brand of rich, stodgy stew as thick as black treacle with lumps of horseflesh floating in it, and through a wanton, heedless scattering of noise and terror tactics, conjure up visions of enough extreme painful body references to turn your stomach.

I wanted a copy of this ever since I saw it reproduced in that arts magazine *Frieze*. It's adorned with Romain Slocombe artwork - that French stylist who was part of the Bazooka movement, a photo-copyist seething with naked cool-jay attitude. If you follow comics you might have seen some Bazooka stuff in Art Spiegelman's avant-gardish *Raw* magazine. Here, you get a booklet of pix of two exquisitely lovely Japanese girls (Yuka and Yuki), nude or scantily clad in frilly undies, all posed to look as though they've been severely injured - swathed in bandages, holding crutches, and daubed with makeup by Kako Kubota to look like bruises. It works as a visual cue to suggest the aural battering your bonce will endure when this record is playing, but



without doubt there's a pervy side - Japanese men find the strangest things a turn-on, but they're especially fond of objectified women forced into submissive positions. Objectionable? Doubtless. This also serves to remind us of the very masculinist nature of noise music. In one corner of the triangle are the Japanese gloating over their expensive shiny black effects boxes like torturor's instruments, in another are us guys in the audience enjoying the sweaty bloodbath like a wrestling match...while the girls are probably crowded out of the picture, leaving the room in disgust.

Susan Lawly, PO Box 914,
Edinburgh EH17 8BF

The Hanatarash 4

USA. Public Bath CD (no number, ND)

A secret cabal of mystical Japanese men are up to something, moving surreptitiously into your cedar closet and then leaping out like Jacks-in-the-Box dressed in gaudy pantomime costumes.

This could be a neo-Dadaist shocking art statement or merely an elaborate schoolboy prank. This CD is one from the 'messy and nasty' school of Japanese Underground, an aspect of the scene which might have put off more than a few casual approachers. It's a beautiful inchoate mess which can achieve moments of resplendent magnificence; but like Boredoms, it can leave an impression of formless chaos to some. Running this gauntlet involves a heckuva lot of screaming - screaming men being tortured, screaming men vomiting their insides out because they're sick to death with the amount of music they have to listen to. They vomit so much they regurgitate the very records they've consumed. So here is God's plenty spilled across your floor like so much diced carrots - the entire collective Hanatarash record

collections coagulating in half-digested form. Environmental-ish recordings of very scratchy Lee Perry reggae records being played in the bathroom while the microphone is in the kitchen of the house next door. Also in the stew - obscure jazz-funk classics; Eugene Chadbourne playing The Beatles; Adrian Mitchell poem from an old Re Records Quarterly; horrendous heavy metal and speed metal; vicious rap attack 12-inchers; and more besides, woven into a subliminal blanket whose textural patterns are only glimpsed occasionally. These guys clearly believe records are meant to be enjoyed and played over and over, inviting you to stick your snout in the trough of consumerist vinyl hog-heaven; contrast and compare with the work of (for example) Western white-boys David Shea or John Oswald, who between them can seem precious, anal-retentive and puritanical about their well-groomed record sources.



The Sound Projector Fourth Issue

Hanatarash by contrast don't seem to give a damn about very much at all. What is there to care about, anyhow?

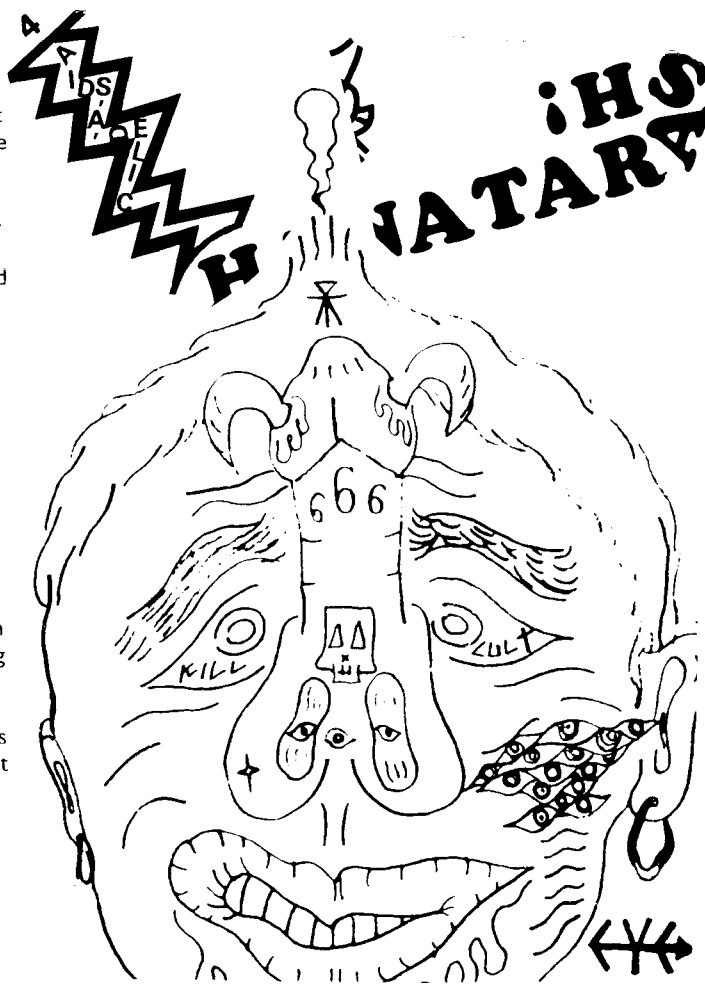
Everything here is damned well fucked up - played at wrong speeds, played backwards, played on poor quality gear, recorded and re-recorded into nth-generation hell, overlapped with things that don't match - all part of a strategy generally intended to induce such repellent sensations of objectionable-ness to make you feel about as sick as the vomiting men themselves. Am I putting you off? Hey, y'should give this kinda thinga spin some day - no-one's expecting you to enjoy it that much, but at the very least it'll make you profoundly aware of the pernicious effects of conditioning that modern life is squeezing you through, to the point where you're beginning not to even notice. We're bombarded with so much ill-fitting, incongruous visual and aural garbage every day that to live in the late 20th century is to live inside a Hanatarash record; the only difference is this band make it into something beautiful, while the rest of the world's media systems don't. Television, advertising, cinema and the Internet are incoherent, gibbering monsters; eating information, not relaying it; they are lumbering Cyclops adrift in the cosmos.

The way the letters look and not what the words mean: this is the Japanese fascination with Western fonts, words and phrases. Result: some beautiful Dadaist titles on this CD, such as 'My tooth is sore diamond', 'How to use my hole', 'Full Speed Forgetman' and 'Bank is Dead Eskimo'. Read these documents until they speak to you.

Hoahio, *Happy Mail*

Japan, Amobic, AMO-HOA01 (1997)

Not strictly an 'underground' item, nor is it noisy, but it is Japanese. The core of Hoahio are two Japanese women, of which Haco led a band called After Dinner in the 1980s. The other, Matsubara Sachiko, played the sampler with Ground-Zero - and the wonderful Otomo Yoshihide produced this LP for them. For *Happy Mail* they're joined by third member koto player Michiyo Yagi and two other guys. Here's a beguiling, enchanting and fun record combining off-kiltre pop songs with some beautiful electronic noises and drones. Unlike the male approach to electronic music (aggressive Techno or heavy-handed Ambient, for example) our two lovely ladies show us how to use the medium's



potentials like a box of watercolours - translucent, unobtrusive, allusive.

I picked this up following a 1997 gig @ The Spitz, which was one of those rare things - a real-time live epiphany. After the initial songs and pieces, which I remember as being impressive but only 'interesting', things took a near-spiritual turn for the remainder of the set. Some 40 minutes of transcendent bliss followed. I remember Haco waving her porcelain hands over the pocket Theremin like a female magus, making magical passes; and the plastic-looking guitar she held against her like a close friend, not a machine gun to attack the crowd. The duo of Haco and Matsubara were not projecting their noise at us - rather, somehow drawing us into their mysterious world, presenting us with the sight of a rare and gentle species, in danger of extinction. Everyone went quiet - in sympathy with

the quiet music, eager not to miss a thing. A virtual communion. Harley R. remembers this well as the only time he has been to a bar at a gig, and everyone there was *whispering*.

All *Happy Mail* work is about 50% composed and 50% improvised - which is about the only route left for anyone to go if they want to survive the fires of the millennium anyhow. Songs are delivered in the Japanese tongue, but even those of the less esoteric bent (I mean fans of The Cranberries or something like that) are sure to find some interest in these ditties resembling a post Raincoats / Slits intimate disclosure, lo-fi excursion. In fact, their interest lies in melding many flavours and styles of music, including 'punk, minimal, ethnic, techno, pop, noise, ambient' but if you think you've heard that one before, I'd point out there's some real cookery craft going on here - I mean they don't just throw everything in the microwave to produce a 200-flavour ice-cream with chili sauce mix, fast-food junk. They know what they're dealing with; it's more nourishing. 'Happy Mail' is a phenomenon of the digital communication age, probably involving a routing device that ensures you don't get obscene e-mails posted on your workstation. Haco received a fax from her Italian friend one day, signed with the mysterious word *Hoahio*. She thought it was an informal Italian phrase and copied it for the band name. In fact, he'd simply been trying to say *Good Morning* in Japanese - *Ohayo*. What's round at both ends and Hay in the middle? Boy, I bet when she tried using that phrase in Milan - was her face red!

After Dinner released one LP in this country, thanks to the good graces of Chris Cutler. It was a compilation from their 7" and 12" Japanese singles and not half bad last time I dusted it down! Haco has also played and recorded with her other

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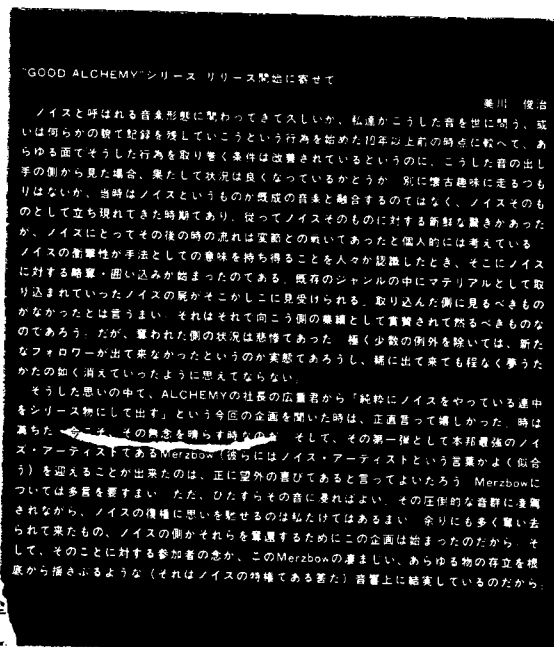
group Neatopia. The great Matsubara released several private pressing tapes in 1996, among them *Chigum c/w Poda*, *Sonfa c/w Illil* and *Eiyu Honshoku Yokokuhen c/w Presented by Atom*. *Music for Headphone* is another cassette, also on the Amoebic label. Apart from work with Ground-Zero and certain Otomo side projects (Twins, Memory Defacement) her work graces CDs by Phew and violinist Jon Rose.

Merzbow, *Rainbow Electronics* Japan, Alchemy Records ARCD-017 (1990)

If you have any abiding interest left in guitar groups, hearing *Rainbow Electronics* should probably cure you once and for all - those with cherished illusions or favourite guitar heroes, keep away. Here is some of the strangest and bleakest music ever made. As always, the noise is the barrier that most will fall at; so why not try it at a low volume, and see how far you get. The very oddness of it will still seep through. Utterly compelling fascination at its very alien-ness will keep you glued to the speakers for the duration, while the harsh exterior of screaming feedback will keep prying non-believers and debt collectors far from your door.

This CD is already a tough-cookie-to-find on the famous Alchemy label in Japan, home to fellow monstrosities Masonna, Hijokaidan and Incapacitants. Masami Akita, the Japanese soloist extremist, put it together in 1990 working from the simplest of means, the starting point being cut-ups of his own live tapes recorded between 1987 and 1990. A joyous act of decomposition followed. The scrambling, insane disordering process is evident in every second of this sprawling action painting in sound - the original recordings were of the very noisiest to begin with, then re-recorded with added distortion and added electronic effects. Equipment and tape loops are left to fend for themselves in a sickening, twisted battle to the death. The visual parallels on the sleeve art are obvious - messy painterly abstractions rendered even more incomprehensible through wanton massacre with the scapel. Yet harken to Hollis Frampton on his problem with 'making the artist visible':

'The thumbprint aspect of abstract expressionism represented one kind of visibility: only a particular personality, a particular set of anxieties could have manipulated the surface in quite that way, could have



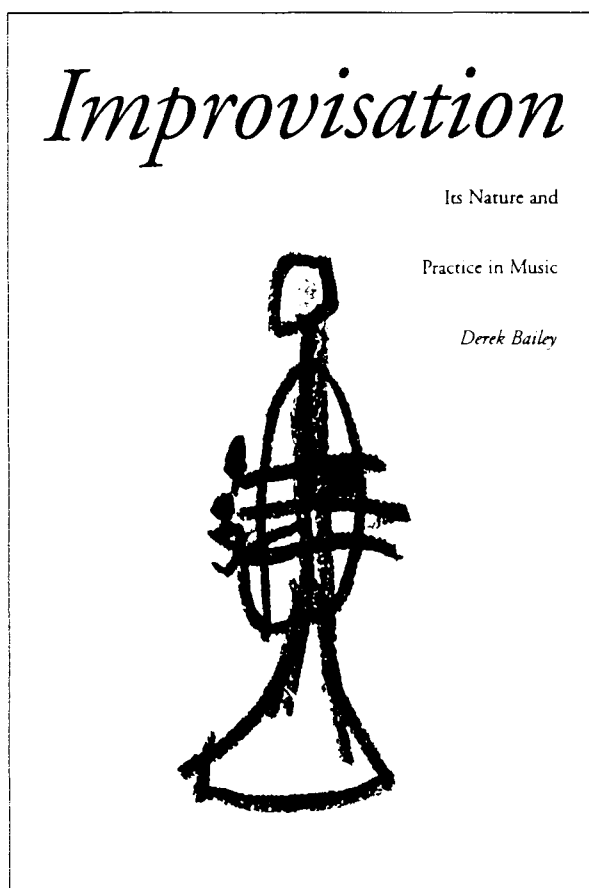
Carlsson reports:

'I did see Merzbow last summer, but I'm afraid I wasn't that impressed. I much prefer his music on disc, contrary to many others that I know. The fact that I'm almost allergic to loud volume at concerts didn't make it any better. They sold ear-plugs at the show, which I guess is a good thing, but I still think it was way too loud. Probably blasphemous to say that...Swedish improv-saxophone-Brotzmanesque big man Dror Feiler not only ruined the second Merzbow set with his reeds, but reportedly he was furious because the organisers sold ear-plugs. He told them it was an insult to Masami Akita's "artistic vision". Damn, I'm tired of that sort of elitist crap.' Exactly - let us stand up for our right to be inflicted with tinnitus! To initiate, *Rainbow Electronics* is another Station of the Cross - the humanity inside its beastliness is easily trawled, about as easily as harvesting gold from the ocean.

produced that set of traits which, when taken together, constitute an empirical visible style.'

As above, so below. So it be with this unusual and frightening sound - what may seem emotionless and sterile noise is, I believe, brimming with personality. How is it that a 'characterless' noise is so quickly identifiable as Masami's? He himself would probably not even care to affirm this, trusting heavily in the spirit of automatism as practised by his beloved Surrealists. Among the scrawling ones who dabbled in this near-satantic, trancelike art of plugging into their subconscious were Rene Crevel, Andre Masson and Max Ernst; the word-tappers included poets Paul Eluard, Robert Desnos, Benjamin Peret. Like the French intellectuals they were they adapted methods of automatism from psychoanalysis, and published automatic drawings and writings in *La Revolution Surrealiste*. Would they have embraced Merzbow into their fold? 'I wanted to compose real surrealist music in a non-musical way. Surrealism is also reaching unconsciousness. Noise is the primitive and collective consciousness of music. My composition is automatism, not improvisation.'

Merzbow earned the eulogy treatment from us last issue - lovers of harsh noise in this country probably need no introduction and have been faithful to his sounds for years. Perhaps a little too faithful? My Swedish correspondent Tommy



The Phantom Of Liberty

Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music, By Derek Bailey

NEW YORK, DA CAPO PRESS 1993:

ISBN 0-306-80528-6. 146 + xiv pp

A necessary read for anyone interested in getting under the skin of this area of music. Improvised music (especially in the UK) has evolved to a point where it can seem an foreboding, highly specialised field to non-initiates. Bailey's user-friendly book goes a long way to debunk that myth, demystifying the process without destroying the magic that makes it happen in the first place. This is the third publication of this text, showing how it's approaching definitive status - it makes the best case for this music, with the possible exception of Eddie Prévost's very conceptual writings.

It starts by almost talking around the subject, with discussions of Indian raga music and Flamenco music, which have strongly recognisable improvisatory elements built into them. These fundamental elements are shown to manifest themselves in rock music (Steve Howe, Jerry Garcia) and jazz (though not much space is given to the latter!), and less

expectedly in organ playing. Cathedral organ improvising has a tradition of its own - usually dictated by the variable length of the sequences within the Catholic service.

Bailey accesses information direct from the hearts and minds of the people who do it; perhaps there is no such thing as improvisation, only improvisers. By interviews and anecdotes he pieces together a mosaic of quite varying and diffuse attitudes and experiences of playing this music. Each new insight can strike you as a fascinating revelation, building on the core of ideas convincingly established.

It's not an attempt at a definitive history of improvisation, here or elsewhere. But historic references are drawn in, from his reading and interviews. Readers expecting a detailed history of the Incus label should look elsewhere; but there is a concise history of Company Week (first started in 1977), and one of the earliest improv groups Joseph Holbrooke (which existed 1963-1966). Gavin Bryars was a member; he went back to composition after trying free improv on the double bass. In a conversation with Bailey, he lucidly explains his disenchantment with free playing - how in his experience an improvisation always followed precisely the same arc of development (from quiet to noisy and back again) and how players always fell into the same traps - for example over-reliance of the 'call and response' mode of musical conversation. Under the circumstances, can free music be considered really free?

One of Bailey's core counter-arguments is to undermine the accepted mainstream alternatives. He's informed by a healthy suspicion of composed, classical music and how it can alienate performer and listener. The very business of watching a symphony orchestra perform is constrictive; a quasi-religious ceremony that demands silence from the audience when the conductor enters, the way this figure leads and directs the musical event (everyone must watch him) confirming his status as a 'high priest'. A composed piece of music has had every nuance of its performance already worked out in advance by its composer; the musicians are little more than hired hands, whose success depends on accurately interpreting what the composer demanded by the correct reading of sheet music. Conversely, the perception of improv from the opposite camp is no less hostile; improvisation is seen by trained musicians as self-indulgent, 'making it up as you go along', and requiring little or no musical talent or experience.

Bailey beats that argument too, often by referring to something that improv does best of all - it gives everyone involved the same opportunity for expression. Keywords here are inclusiveness and compassion. I think Bailey wants everyone to share in and enjoy this music, with a view to discovering its potentials for freedom perhaps. So often the feeling is conveyed (and stated explicitly) that improv is the most natural music in the world; that people who think they can't do it, actually find they can and enjoy it; that this process of enlightenment has philosophical and spiritual overtones.

Above all it's a DOING thing for Bailey. He wants to convey the joy of the act of spontaneous creation, a joy to do and hopefully for audience to listen to, but preferably played live! He rarely describes the process of listening to records, or collecting them; often they're relegated to the status of reference documents, even potentially harmful to the process because they're sometimes inaccurate. The vibrations come from the people playing, from the audience, from the atmosphere and the environment. Be Here Now! Which also means that it's a PEOPLE thing. Classical music thinks of itself in terms of the instruments it wants for the

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score, regardless of who's playing them. Any personality is to be found in the 'star system' of Great Composers - a value system that Bailey finds as pompous as that associated with any European perception of what constitutes Great Art. I have to agree with him - the whole package is sold to us as some kind of ghastly normality, as though things couldn't really be any other way. Improv however means the personalities of the players matter more - and the interaction between them.

Needless to say his own discography is extensive and important, yet effaced by the man's modesty. Even when writing from his own experience, the picture emerges of a man struggling towards a new way of working musically, out of necessity more than anything - the documents that litter the path aren't necessarily full-blown artistic statements.

Factual Note - second reissue of this text first written in 1975-76. First published in 1980. Reprinted under the National Sound Archive imprint. This one is for Da Capo Press in New York and includes groovy photographs. There was a tie-in with a Channel Four series.

Derek Bailey, *Incus Taps* California. Organ of Corti 10 CD

Essential. An important musician, exciting improvisations, historically significant, and a somewhat unusual story behind it. Everything makes this CD a must-have for your shopping basket. A piece in the jigsaw of Bailey's development as a solo improvising guitarist, from 1973. Picture the scene, two years after the release of his first solo record as Incus 2. Bailey had his career as a jobbing session player / dance hall guitarist behind him, sick to the back teeth of major seventh chords and measly pay packets. A definite decision to investigate a different area of endeavour. He'd already done it as a trio with Gavin Bryars and Tony Oxley. But could he make solo guitar improvisations work? Would there be enough going on to sustain interest - for himself or the listener? 'I wanted to know if the language I was using was complete, if it could supply everything I wanted in a musical performance. The ideal way of doing this ... was through a period of solo playing.'

He practiced at home, and taped segments of what he was doing; perhaps other ears could help evaluate how he was doing? Simple enough then to copy sections of 1/4 inch tape on his home Revox, put them in little tape boxes with printed labels, and sell them to anyone who was interested, through his recently formed Incus label at 60 pence a throw. Limited editions; small press publishing of pieces of music; broadsheets of real art news, in the spirit of William Blake. This is how the original Incus Taps appeared; needless to say,

original copies are something you or I will never see, so thank the powers that be they have now been collected onto this CD.

That these things existed at all was a pleasant surprise to this listener; hearing them is much more than merely pleasant. The raw sound aligns them in my mind with my precious USA rural blues collection; there's the same immediacy, a sheer burning need to express something, captured in an inexorable whirlpool of real time recording. We could be hearing a man on the brink of apocalypse, or a man stunned by utter joy. Experimental and exploratory is how these recordings are viewed, yet there's such mastery and authority here that you feel Bailey had it all in him from the start; wound up like a clock spring. Hear him unwind.

All due credit to Tony Mostrom in Los Angeles, the man who organised this reissue, a Bailey listener so attentive and dare one say a little obsessed, that he can *hum along* to favourite passages of Bailey recordings! He finds a song-like, or at least compositional element, in some of these short improvisations. This is someone who must have listened his Incus LPS into the ground. Sounds like the improviser's best friend ... and worst enemy.

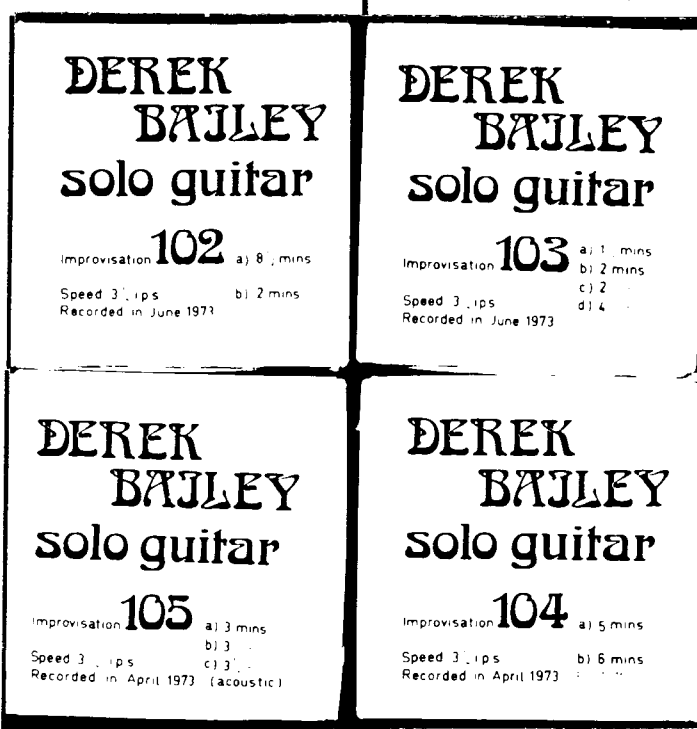
*Organ of corti, PO
Box 6016, Point
Dume, Malbu,
California 90264*

Paul Rutherford, *Sequences 72 & 73* performed by Iskra 1912 Emanem 4018 (1997)

In contrast to the utter solo trip of Bailey above, here's but one of many examples of the warmth and sharing situation of a group ensemble - with the added dimension in that it was partly composed and partly improvised. This previously unissued record is a great success and testament to this method. It was composed by Paul Rutherford, with specific musicians in mind - and what we have here is

a set of all-stars, drawn from the scenes of pure improvised music, jazz sceneries overlappers, and musicians (like Barry Guy) who also composed. Among the roll call are Trevor Watts and Evan Parker on reeds, Howard Riley on piano, and Kenny Wheeler on trumpet and flugelhorn. The score wasn't actually written as a note-for-note meisterwerk, just conceived and created as an open architecture styled framework. Instructions and directions are written to be interpreted by the players, but directed by the composer - signposts at occasional stations in an unknown territory, to make for more efficient 'exploring'. The ensemble playing here never disappoints and is a superb realisation of Rutherford's vision.

There are two long (25 minutes +) studio tracks from 1972 and 1973. Each is so dynamic as to be almost protean, shapeshifting; if it was a vinyl record I'd suggest you drop the needle anywhere on the groove and it could be a different



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record every time. The developments aren't sudden or jarring, but they are totally unexpected; shifts in tone and appearance of players that are both utterly natural and wonderfully surprising. Now if left to *pure* improvisation, chances are it would have taken everyone twice as long to reach these plateaux of achievement, so the composition certainly helps the process! The score's intention was to keep varying the texture, the warp and woof of the fabric - and manage it on a large scale. Soloists are given space to drop in and out as need be, none of the heavily-cued 'take a solo Mike' nonsense you associate with mediocre talents (in jazz or rock combos alike). And there's no percussion, which aids the process tremendously; sometimes a drummer can lead players astray without even meaning to, the other musicians can be misled by that distracting pulse and follow the herd instinct. Here, the large and friendly animal being brought to life breathes in its own sonorous breaths, occupying its own comfortable space, living in its own time. The work has its own inner (unplugged) rhythm, unaided by drums - even if Guy's double bass stabs can sometimes sound like a rim-shot!

The second 'Sequence' benefits from the appearance of Tony Oxley playing some splendidly unsettling live electronic buzz-bursts, and the sublimely shimmering volume-pedalled electric guitar (it's in stereo!) of Derek Bailey. When the horns and voices drop in after his brief 'solo' opening, there's a moment to die for ... visiting ghosts from your family tree are bearing benign messages from the grave. Did I forget the vocalists! Maggie Nicolls and Norma Winstone

contribute a truly celestial dimension to these recordings, and while there's nothing wrong with Maggie's chattery and growly vocalese, it's the sublime Norma Winstone who wins the golden throat award in this domicile. Winstone has been a pioneer in the field of wordless vocals since 1968, when she first performed with the Michael Garrick group. Besides working with Kenny Wheeler, Keith Tippett and the Spontaneous Music Ensemble, she managed a solo LP called *Edge of Time* in 1972 which is probably beautiful (you and I will never see a copy alas).

Iskra 1903 was an improvising trio in the early 1970s, comprising trombonist Rutherford, Bailey and Guy; I think they had one LP on ECM. The Iskra 1912 equation here never performed live, and these studio works have remained unissued until now. Rutherford is no stranger to handling large palying ensembles, for example his work with the London Jazz Composers Orchestra. I have heard one item by them, but it was led and composed by Barry Guy - *Double Trouble*, issued in 1990 by RecRec in Switzerland. *Sequences* works so well it seems to almost glow with the warmth of

compassion - a scarce enough commodity in any case, and certainly hard to translate into music. Assurance, quietness and space - mirabile dictu, it sounds like a good place to be, a good way to live. Where do I join in?

Irène Schweizer and Mani Neumeier, *European Masters of Improvisation* Japan, Captain Trip, CTCD-068

A duo performance, naturally, captured from a concert at Mannheim in 1990 with lots of amplifier hum and audience noise ... a terrific atmosphere in other words, and the brilliant sound of the piano soon overtakes everything else. Schweizer (for those who don't know) being one cool chick



of mature years, a piano player of no small virtuosity and clued in to many developments in modern jazz music. She has a distinguished career represented by many LPs on the FMP label, either solo or in groups. Irène is a tad stiff and reticent at the start of each performance, but after some minutes she will transcend the air of the Conservatoire and once she gets going every heart in the concert hall is pumping. She seems so well informed by the history of various jazz piano styles that she almost plays her way through their history; starting out awkward and angular, belting out flattened chords like pure be-bop Monk; leading into a little mid-60s McCoy Tyner, before she freaks out with the block chords and all-out attack of a Cecil Taylor. As for Mani Neumeier on the drums, he tends to reins himself in - if you want to hear his freakier side, there are

some *Tiere Der Nacht* CDs reviewed on another page this issue. He gets the job done however and turns in some European-styled percussion work, at times a little cymbal-heavy for this listener; one senses he's being a little polite to the lady he's accompanying, which gallant though it be isn't always a recipe for great music. So - Han Bennink and Misha Mengleberg it ain't, but it's more than adequate.

Spontaneous Music Orchestra with John Stevens and Trevor Watts, *For You to Share* Emanem 4023 (1998)

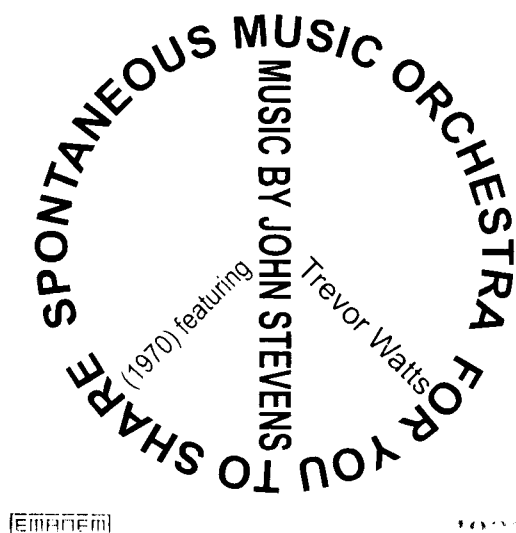
Highly desirable item, not just because it's great music. Firstly, it deals in political idealism in a way that transcends politics, which is why it appeals to me (apolitical fool that I be). I haven't met many political activists, but those I have are often lacking in humour and compassion; they sacrifice those components of humanity on the altar of political progress. John Stevens, conversely, somehow managed his left-wing ideals within a context of freedom and happiness as

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priorities. Profits from the sales of *For You to Share* (originally issued in 1973 as a private pressing on A Records) were intended to go to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. In a way the track 'Peace Music' (an semi-related studio recording) deals with the issues of nuclear war not by bitter, narrow-minded complaining about the sheer inhumanity or the colossal waste of money; but by proposing, as a music statement, what the alternative is. Anyone with a pair of ears will know which one to choose. To me, that is achieving something through art.

Secondly, a more mystical dimension. The semi-skilled performers under Steven's tutelage chant a beautiful mantra at the end of the first piece, which gradually reveals itself to be 'If you want to see a vision, you can see a vision ... you will see a vision'. There is, I feel, an urgent need for more statements like this in the world - a simple encouragement, a prompt towards a form of spirituality, an empowering message of hope. Anything might be possible. Let it be writ large in your heart today.

Recordings are from 1970, mostly performed by John Stevens who composed, and Trevor Watts on soprano saxophone. Plus a collection of young musicians and audience members joining in to generate a 'Great Learning' styled piece of improvised beauty and translucent ethereal drones - voices and instruments melding in a cloud. Through his inclusiveness and exhortation to all to join in, Stevens managed more than simply a jolly 'Come-All-Ye' musical experience; he enacted real democracy, and passed on an awareness of the greater community, the family of man. The world is a colder and sadder place without him. In the words of his own composition, 'Now time for unification ... now time for liberation'. A timely and essential release.



Charlie Parker, *Charlie Parker LP*
Various Artists, *Ones, Twos, and Threes CD*
Various Artists, *Ice Cream Festival CD*
Atlanta, Old Gold Records

Charlie Parker are a combo of enthusiastic, if not especially original, free blowing, scraping and honking young hopefuls in the Southern State of Georgia USA. If you want to check out local free music scenes in America here's one place to begin; check next review for another scene, in Seattle. Musically, this is probably somewhat of a third or fourth generational



thing, as one suspects that our musicians here have learned what they know chiefly from their free-jazz and improvisation record collections, then joined together in various garages and rehearsal theatres to share their passions with like-minded friends. There is nothing wrong with this, but I wonder about the enclosedness of the scene. Isn't it just one step above cassette-band status? Even though this is pressed on (single-sided) vinyl it's not exactly ECM reproduction quality. Neither does it convey the fierce, independent and frightening qualities that Forced Exposure or Thurston Moore might be looking for in one of their contemporary outlaw free jazz issues - Charlie Parker are just a shade too polite, and even (dare I say it) a shade too white. I may be way out of line here, as I've never seen the band. Featuring the combined talents of horn blowers Ben Jarvis, Richard Galloway and Witt Mills, Andrew Crenshaw on clarinet, and Marc Steinberg on violin.

The same observations apply to *Ones, Twos and Threes*. This is a document of concerts from Spring 1996 performed at a cafe in Atlanta GA, HQ of Old Gold records. My guess is the organisers modelled what they were doing on Company Week, proclaiming the opportunity for 'individuals to explore new territories in improvisation and to work with other musicians in new and unfamiliar situations', but on this occasion they threw the net a bit wider and allowed anybody who was 'open to improvising' to join in. This included not just musos, but poets and dancers and 'other improvisational artists' - which latter category is pretty open-ended to say the least, and probably aligns Ones Two and Threes with The Klinker nights in London (NB I've never been there - only read the flyers) extending into anarchic frolics, street theatre and performance art. At least one of the Atlantans, Angus Whyte, wore a humorous mask - judging from the video-grabs printed on the insert here. Despite all this commitment to making it a 'happening', very little excitement comes over from the CD - no tension, no sweat, no danger. Some quite interesting tinkering and experimenting, but it's too timid - nobody here really cuts loose and flies free. These people appear afraid to use their own distinctive voice, and it's simply not enough to namecheck the 'right' musicians by imitating their famous sounds. Still, at least you might want to check out the free guitar playing of Wes Daniel and Rob Parham which sounds pretty good against

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the acoustic piano of Troy Piper here. And Rob Mallard's saxophone duelling with the bass-droney electric guitar of David Daniell is another highlight; at least it seems more articulate and purposeful than the remaining rather aimless performances. I think our friends need a little more maturity before they can deliver something useful into the arena of free playing.

Much more worthwhile is the *Ice Cream Festival*, only some 13-14 months later (5 July 1997) and a more convincing attempt at a good free music festival. The CD is much better recorded and there's some excellent performances from all involved. Gold Sparkle Band may amount to an 'average' free jazz quartet, but they're spirited. LaDonna Smith wails along with her violin accompaniment to devastating effect; she's her own Greek chorus. Charlie Parker also sound better here when properly recorded, and aren't as overly-anxious to impress with twittering, fast-fingering acrobatics as on the LP above; here, they're melancholy and alienated, with Witt Mills's mournful trombone underpinned by two electric bassists including Ellen McGrail. Shaking Ray Levis are a fun-loving duo who liven up the evening with their redneck ass-kicking antics, raising some 'southern-fried mayhem' with just keyboards, drums and nasty vocal yawpings. On the sleeve photo, they look like a couple of rough customers fresh out of the State Pen.

Outhouse, *Process of Elimination* AP001 (1998)

UnFolkUs

Seattle. Unit Circle Rekkids, no number CD (1998)

Further evidence of a local USA contemporary improv scene on these two CDs, emanating from Seattle-based bands. Outhouse debut here on their self-published CD distributed via Unit Circle, and they're the livelier of the brace. To prepare the skeptical listener, just think of Ornette Coleman's Prime Time, James Blood Ulmer (a Harmolodics practitioner he, since 1980 at least), Sonny Sharrock's Last Exit or any of John Zorn's incarnations and imitations of the above. Outhouse pack a joyous blast with their slightly rocky two guitar, drum and bass line-up, leader and producer being Mr Stephen Cavit the drummer - recorded in pristine quality and never overpowering their alto saxophonist, Paul Chuey. Only occasionally does the electric half of the band drop their guard and admit some flashes of (earlier Seattle fads) guitar grunge or spacerock into the mix; elsewhere a fairly convincing job is turned in by all. Most successful to my mind is 'Footprints' a version of a Wayne Shorter (of Weather Report...he also played with Miles Davis in the so-called 'electric' period) composition, which gave them something to learn and deal with, rather than grooving mindlessly along with their own semi-structured jams, which admittedly can be a little stodgy. To alleviate that, we need more of the lightly-tripping rhythms to be found in any of the music by other bands listed above. Still, it sounds like everyone enjoyed themselves and how you can resist a fun track title like 'One Short Film about Glenn Gould'.

UnFolkUs is quite a different affair, inward-looking and mysterious. The four players work well with a clear serious intent to performing with commitment. The internal mechanics that make improvisation work like a series of meshing gears are all here, and not just a series of empty forms learned from old records. In performance, you can still discern the odd ghost of rock music in the guitar sounds and the percussion stylings (played by Eveline Muller-Graf, on 'sharp metal objects') now and again. Some of the players

are a little afraid of getting too unhinged; they occasionally yearn to retreat into areas of patterned rhythms or modal scales. But Paul Hoskin more than makes up for this, as the 'purest' improviser of the players here, he blows a contrabass clarinet that virtually paints your speakers black. When he lets rip on the alto sax, and Bill Horist deploys his pedals, the combination can be like a low-rent Hendrix meeting an undiscovered BYG label free-jazz obscurity. This mixture extends to the recording itself, which combines a documentation technique so upfront and accurate that Hoskin is breathing right in your face - with more rockish elements like use of effects pedals at source, and permitting overdubs (which few uptight UK improvisers would go for). My advice to the team would be to let the ideas hang out even more - these tracks could have been spun into something twice their length, and might appear less inconsequential.

Hoskin is some kind of veteran and reckoned to be a founder of the improv scene in Seattle; after his world travels and sojourns in the East (NYC), he returned to Seattle to play in other local combos Tactile and Bolt. UnFolkUs have performed in downtown art galleries; good to hear, with the dark and strange emotions this music generates, that Seattle has a grimy and gritty side too (something not reflected in *Frasier!*).

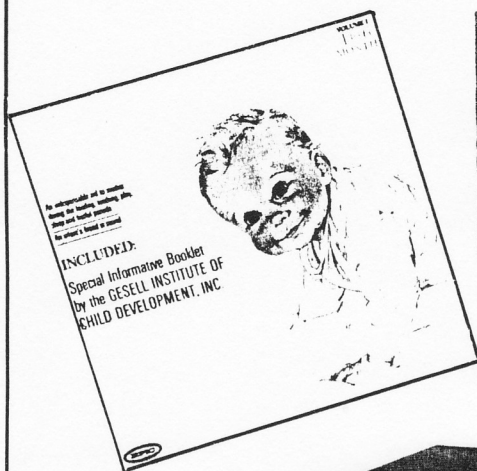
Bonehouse, *Click*

Nerve Technologies, NERVE 001 (1998)

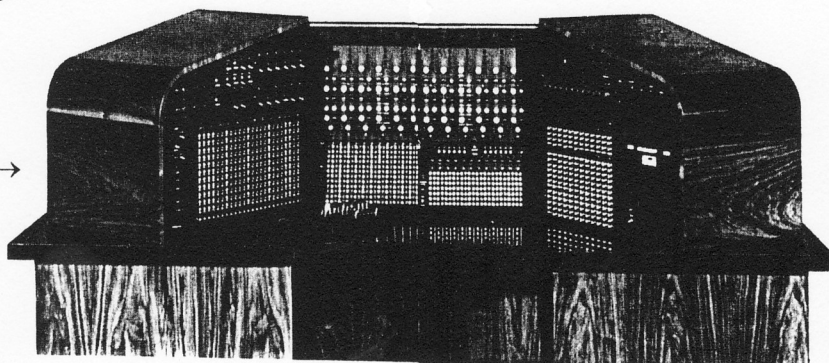
A debut CD from a team of Liverpool-based improvising musicians, Phil Morton (guitar and effects) and Phil Hargreaves (saxophones and flute). A pretty effective coupling of the duo, who have been playing together for six years and perhaps trying to start some sort of free-playing scene up in the Pool of Life, in the face of (one suspects) an indifferent and apathetic audience. Hargreaves started musical life in an early punk band, where he came to hate the noise of a guitar, and to love the liberating possibilities of improvising. He's played with local pop bands and a new music combo called The Hub Ensemble. Morton has experimented with tape pieces. They have hooked up for sessions with Derek Bailey and saxophonist Tony Bevan.

This is a pleasant CD but a tad tame - you might think six years of playing would have nurtured more interesting musical conversations between the duo. The best track for me is 'Mortal', which uses the tape-delay to set up a looped rhythm, over which the guitar proceeds to imitate a mass of violins while the saxophone just sits and moans. More than a trace of King Crimson's *Larks Tongues in Aspic* here, and not just the David Cross violin impersonation - the same portentous sense of alarm and doom prevails. I prefer the minimal playing here to that on some of the other tracks, performances which are competent enough but somehow deliver too many notes per square inch. With the stuttering sax blasts and volume-pedalled guitar, the sound is highly reminiscent of Derek Bailey and Evan Parker playing together, yet somehow Bonehouse lack the necessary friction, or attack. They can be a bit too polite with each other and one senses a certain lack of adventure. This soft-centredness extends to the slightly twee titles, such as 'Forgotten People' and 'The occurrence of a face'. These titles could almost be avant-garde ripostes to 'Eleanor Rigby' and 'I've just seen a face'. Does every Liverpoolian man have a potential Paul McCartney living inside him?

*From Nerve Technologies, PO Box 36,
Liverpool L15 9JD*

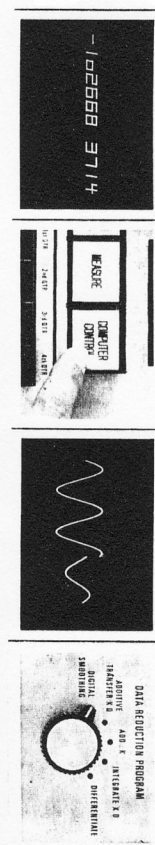
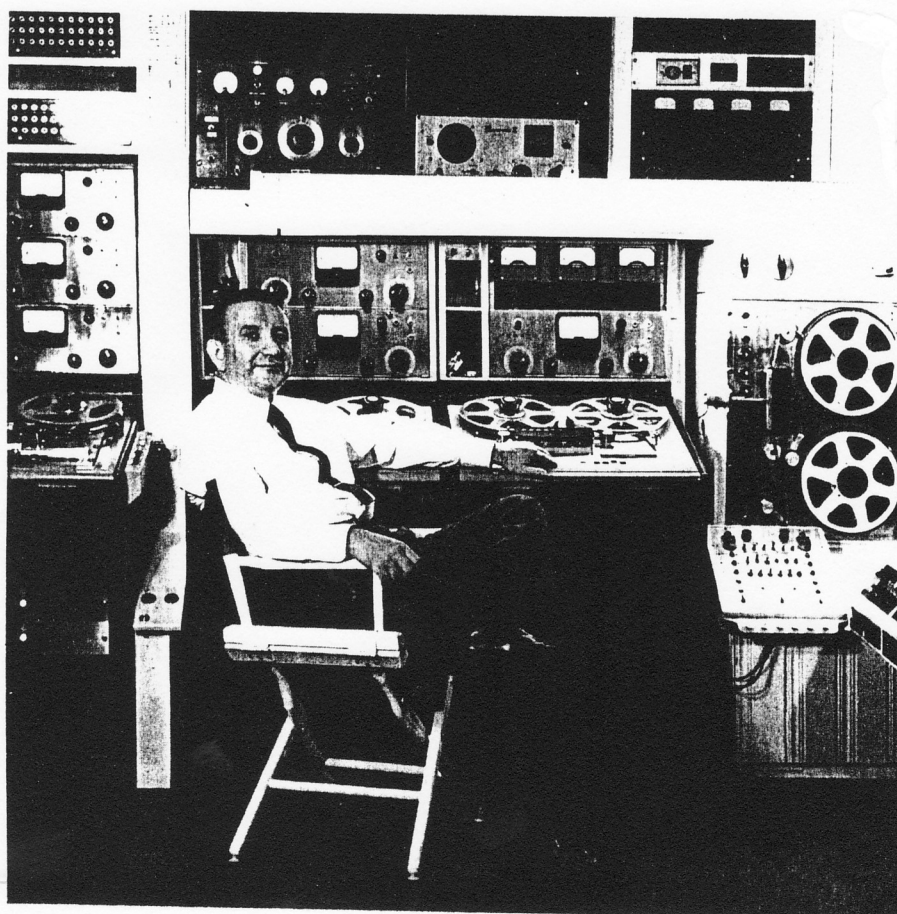


The
Electronium →



↑
A three-album series
on EPIC records

↓
Raymond Scott



"An Infant's Friend in Sound"

The "Mystery" of Raymond Scott, part 2

Soothing Sounds for Baby Volumes 1, 2, 3

Holland, Basta Audio/Visuals (SONY Music Entertainment Holland) 904642, 90652, 90662 (1997)

EVEN IF YOU STAYED with us this far from our Raymond Scott story in issue 3, I reckon you'll hardly be prepared for these eerie records of creepy, simplistic and modernistic electronic music. Imagine the tunes torn from a jolly nursery rhyme book, the very musical staves cut to pieces, punched onto paper tape and then fed into a 1950s Weird Science gigantic computing brain, whose analytical circuits would strip everything down to its basic components and spit out ... this. Pure distilled innocence, and yet laced with an edge of lunar crepuscularity. Over three compact discs, the selection of toons comprises quite upbeat bouncy jingles that you can almost hum, some truly transcendent monotonous drones, and skeletal excursions into the realms of the downright scary. Of which the prime example is the endless, inhuman chattering of the 'Toy Typewriter', no more than a series of tinny, bodiless pulses marching out in a relentless, mathematical sequence. One visualises a giant piano on the order of *The 5000 Fingers of Dr T* movie, refitted with huge oscillators and played by the crab-creature from *This Island Earth*...

It is something of a leap to square all this weirdness with the original, rather bourgeois, intention behind these products - they were family records, scientifically designed to send your infant child to a comforting sleep as it lay serene in the painted wooden crib beneath a cashmere blanket. Working under the Gesell Institute of Child Development, Raymond Scott proposed this as a commercial venture, and succeeded - they were originally issued on the Epic label, some time in the early 1960s, and intended to sell to wholesome white American families. Scott naturally enough believed in the calming effect of monotonous music, particularly on the innocent ear, which is hard to argue with; these CDs have often sent me to sleep, which shows I'm either working too hard or I never really grew up. Scholars of David

Toop's tome *Ocean of Sound* will be familiar with his diverse 'music in the womb' scenarios; Brian Eno's first Ambient release was found to work as an aid to childbirth in hospitals, so he promptly created a longer version for those difficult breech births. A visit to any branch of Mothercare will ascertain the presence of specialist musical relaxation tapes targeted at young mums. It's easy enough to attribute motherhood as the wellspring of all music - George Martin's hideous TV series started off on that footing, the rhythm of the heartbeat in the womb, cries to our mother being the first sounds we ever make. As I write scientists are proposing a new theory that music is in fact perceived by foetuses still in the womb - and some of them even remember it after they're born ...

Scott's *Soothing Sounds for Baby* is far too sophisticated and ingenious to be tied down to its original concept - I think it has a cultural significance beyond that. It's strange and wonderful. If it had been adopted for its purpose more universally, it could have seriously warped an entire generation. The CIA probably held secret experiments in a isolation tank someplace in a grain silo in Arkansas. Who would qualify as 'electric babies', raised under the influence of this Ur-Techno? Personally I would vote for The Residents, even if they're technically too old to have heard these records in their playpens their twisted psyches are written all over their early attempts at making records, clearly trying to exorcise themselves of that pesky Toy Typewriter sound they half-remember.

THE ANALYSIS OF the records has proven rewarding to the team of dedicated producers who have issued this labour of love. Everything's a bit of a mystery. The actual release and recording dates aren't known exactly (about 1962 or 1963 is the educated guess); looks like these issues were stricken from the Epic catalogues in quite a hurry. Moreover, nobody knows for certain which instruments Scott is playing here; but Tom Rhea (a first-hand observer of Scott's work) has had a good listen. Most of the melodies are probably played on the Ondioline, a French electronic keyboard. There is lots of tape echo and reverb. And Eico-generators, which are oscillators used for laboratory purposes by electricians. As to Scott's own home-made devices - the Clavivox is not used, but there is the detectable presence of an early form of the

Electronium. What the devil were these devices?

MANHATTAN RESEARCH was the name of Raymond Scott's (real name Harry Warnow) soundlab at Long island NY, set up in the late 1940s. History is now beginning to perceive him as a transitional figure in development of electronic 80s technology; he foresaw and developed many of the principles of the synthesizer, the sequencer and Midi Technology. Yet he never secured a patent on any of his inventions, and his name is not a household word like Robert Moog's.

The Clavivox, for example - it was developed with the help of Robert Moog, at that time a young graduate fresh out of Columbia University. This was a performance keyboard device, with sophisticated controls including a glide / portamento manipulator. This glide made it sound a bit like a Theremin, and of course gives it the 'human' voice, unlike most electronic keyboards with their fixed pitch or uniform rate glide. But the Clavivox was too complicated a design to mass-produce, thus not at all a commercial proposition, even if the principle was. The glide was in fact produced by mechanical, not electronic means, involving a helical twist behind each key which could rotate a vane to a different position - thus causing a piece of smoked film to interrupt a photoelectric light source. An elegant concept, but extremely difficult to manufacture - and since it was mechanical it depended on very fine engineering tolerances, so the keyboard would often go out of tune quickly.

In 1960 Scott was developing one of the first programmable, polyphonic sequencers. Without sequencers, disco and dance music would not exist. Nowadays, of course, a modern digital sequencer is a tiny black box powered by microchips. But Scott's sequencer was a monster, six feet high and thirty feet across. It required hundreds of switches to control the stepping relays, timing solenoids and tone circuits. It had 16 separate oscillators to generate sounds, and by way of manuals it was equipped with a modified Hammond organ, a 1930s French synthesizer Ondes Martenot, and two keyboard Theremins designed by Scott. The music issuing from the speaker was one thing, but if you went around the back of the casing it was another story - the relays made a hideous clackety noise as the machine was operating.

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The sheer Forbidden-Planet styled clunkiness of these machines is certainly appealing to the modern music fan, especially with the widespread contemporary fad regarding use of analogue synths or (more lately) second-hand toy instruments found in Charity Shops. The barely-works factor is probably highly appealing to those who must be fed up with the inhuman perfection of modern digital instruments. One wonders if Scott himself had something of the tinkering boffin inside of him; you'd have to get some compulsive thrill out of fiddly, elaborate gadgetry to build something as Heath-Robinsonesque as those two instruments described above. The Electronium sounds a little more economical, but only a little...

The Electronium was something that developed out of the sequencer project. This was an early use of artificial intelligence in music-making; it was a programmable device and activated by a single microswitch. The principle involved a complex random generation of sequenced tones, rhythms and pitches. But the player-operator set the parameters. The machine did the composing and the performing. You 'suggested' ideas and themes, using the console. You listened to the resulting random sequence of notes over the monitor. When you had something you liked you put the Electronium into start mode and begin taping. It taped everything on its built in tape-recorder, and you could keep the successful bits. You could then start to modify: put everything in a higher key; repeat phrases; extend one section, shorten another; make segments faster or slower ... complete control could be yours. The Electronium proposed a 'duet relationship between man and machine', because it was doing some very unpredictable things (which is kind of ironic, because Scott had always insisted on absolute precision and control with his live music performances). Where the Clavivox was a 'simple' performance instrument, the Electronium was an elaborate system for interacting with sound. Scott had in mind a commercial application for the Electronium - it

would be a short-cut to composing film or TV scores quickly and less expensively. He had his chance to make it commercial, too. The device interested Berry Gordy at Motown, who hired Scott to work there in Research and Development for five years in 1972. But don't go scurrying off to scrutinise the 'weird' sound of those early Stevie Wonder 45s just yet ... it seems nothing Scott ever came up with made it onto record. Motown productions seem to have been acquiring a reputation for being a bit experimental and strange; I wonder if

man behind T.O.N.T.O., and intends to have it up and running for a demonstration one day.

THE USUAL NEED we all have for perceiving a continuum of progress in musical endeavour makes it possible for us to situate these Raymond Scott activities in some sort of line that leads into Brian Eno, Kraftwerk and (ultimately) modern Ambient and Techno music. Irwin Chusid is certainly keen to see Scott restored to his rightful place in history; his throwaway line (in *Mix* magazine, October 1993)

'And Ralf and Florian never even said thanks!' is very telling. Chusid is director of the Raymond Scott archives in Hoboken and kindly provided sources for this article. As indicated above, it seems Scott was the unsung father of the Moog Synthesizer - he had many of the fundamental ideas, but Robert Moog made them work



they deserve it? I first noticed this the 1980s, when David Byrne was impressed by Berry's avant-gardish notion of using the same rhythm track on two or more different records. But, as Byrne himself pointed out, it was probably just done to save money. Berry Gordy was a formula man, and saw the Electronium as another building block for developing his music - fitting for the kind of assembly-line approach he espoused. In the end, nothing came of the meeting between Scott and Gordy; Scott just kept on with his endless tinkering, never fully satisfied with anything; the Motown chief wanted immediate results.

Scott had moved back to Los Angeles by 1970. Even in retirement he was continuing to experiment with MIDI systems, a species of which he'd come close to discovering in the early 1980s anyway. He had his first stroke in 1987, after which he was unable to speak ever again, let alone work. The Electronium had failed to get a patent, on a technical point - there was a French instrument (totally unrelated) already called by that name. The prototype device sat gathering dust in Scott's house after his death, until Mark Mothersbaugh bought it. He's restoring it with the help of Malcolm Cecil - the

where Scott couldn't - or wouldn't. Yet there was no bitterness and Scott remained friend and admirer of Robert Moog all his life. The success wasn't just about producing weird sounds, of course, but developing something that worked and could be mass-produced. Scott for all his genius never quite mastered that side of it, and the cumbersomeness of his lovely big items in their wood cabinets is quite some way from the miniaturised, micro-chip technology that makes electronic music so easy (and portable!) today.

Scott was something of an outsider, I think. He never quite finished anything off satisfactorily due to endless tinkering; he was a little paranoid of others messing with his ideas. And I believe he had a fixated vision of what he wanted his music to be - as *Soothing Sounds for Baby* should convince you. The development of these astounding instruments of his was driven by the need to realise that personal vision, rather than inventing something intended for use by other musicians. He was the Electronic Harry Partch. A maverick to the last, Scott achieved something more important than simply ending up as the Secret Godfather of Techno - let's reserve that accolade for Giorgio Moroder!

In the ART GALLERY



**Conrad Schnitzler, *The Piano Works*
Volume 1**

Germany, Individuelle Mythologic, IM 001 (1998)

The first release in a new sub-label of Norbert Schilling's Plate Lunch, Individual Mythology will be devoted to releasing the piano works of Conrad Schnitzler - as opposed to his purely electronic works. As we'll see, there's a fine difference. 20 volumes are planned. Volume 2 will be proposing some more...erm...deconstructed compositions, whereas *The Piano Works Volume 1* is an hour's listening of modern techno player-piano works, composed using the disk piano. Highly rhythmical and 'full of ironic statements towards virtuosity', this music exhibits a weird humour in equal amounts to the truculence and rather stern attitude we know and love Conrad for. Very much resembling the work of Conlon Nancarrow superficially, and produced in the same way as Frank Zappa's synclavier works or Martin Archer's *88 Enemies*, though with quite different results. So don't expect any pretty melodies, but there are these engaging short melodies repeated over and over, machine-like, and some discordant harmonies that jar like day-glo colours imprinted on a padded jacket; all this and the bouncy cross-rhythmical patterns should keep you going till the end of the disc.

Conrad was led into using the piano keyboard by default. His electronic works were his primary interest, but he found he was sometimes required to play or compose them (often the same thing for him) using a conventional keyboard.

Synthesisers and sequencers - what miserable inventions they turned out to be. They could have been limitless in their scope, but for whatever reason, manufacturers continue to configure these devices so that they can be played like a piano with the familiar black and white keys and twelve notes to an octave. A daft concession to user-friendliness that curtails creative potential. Conrad also found himself running up against another common pitfall, the very limited pre-programmed piano sound. (This can be perhaps a tape sample as I believe Yamaha have done in their commercial instruments, although there is a way to imitate a piano sound electronically by means of a 'patch'). At first he used this piano sound as one more element in his patchwork quilt of bizarre noises, until he began to experiment with piano-only pieces.

This move coincided with a switch from playing a 64-key synth (set at 'piano' mode) to an 88-key electric piano. Physically, this simply meant more of a challenge regarding where to move your arms, or place your fingers. But no percussive-acoustic Cecil Taylor approach for Conrad, as he continued to eschew the acoustic piano. He remained

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electronic, but the attributes and dimensions of a piano began to be an important part in the compositional process. A bit like a carpenter who switches from Black and Decker power tools to an old fashioned hand-saw.

Then the dreaded disk piano comes into the picture. This grotesque digital invention has a vast memory of megabytes which allows its user to record himself playing 'live' at the keyboard, but then perform editing in the computer memory later. Thus you can change tempo, copy phrases and alter them, and transpose entire sequences of notes. (Wouldn't Raymond Scott have loved it!) Or, method two - you can write a composition direct to the hard drive without even playing a note, then continue to reconfigure the work as above. Conrad Schnitzler used both methods for *Piano Works*, and either way the result is always brilliant, a whirling dervish of impossible sounds. Conrad, arriving at the same point as many synclavier players, delights in two aspects of this impossibility: one, that he produces a combination or sequence of notes which no human being could possibly perform in real time; two, that the disk piano effects sounds which cannot be generated on a real piano. That these things can be so intensely troublesome to classically trained pianists is clearly a source of great satisfaction to our hero.

But this intractability also fits in with what I consider to be Conrad's anchorite, isolationist approach - and make no mistake, he's been true to that aesthetic for longer than any modern electronic upstart on Kevin Martin's *Isolationism* showcase. He insists on self-sufficiency to the max - the composer is his own performer, and the machines that he commands do precisely what he wants them to do. The evident mastery of technology is something, I suggest, that he has achieved far more successfully than virtually any Krautrock - associated synthesist you could bring before me on the podium - and this would have to include Edgar Froese and Klaus Schulze, impressive as they may be. I love their music, but it's soft-centred compared to Conrad's; Tangerine Dream always seemed to settle for the first nice sound that emerged ten minutes after they plugged in. It's easy (even more so nowadays) to let the technology make decisions for you; this facility is something that Conrad would never dream of accepting into his disciplined regime.

Finally, let me say that because the piano sound here is familiar to us (more so than the abstract electric terrors of *Rot* for example), it gives us a point of access to Conrad's distinctive ideas. The construction and composition remains strange and exciting, but this way the process seems that bit more transparent and approachable, showing us more clearly the depths of his unconventionality, and the capabilities of his constant invention.

*Recorded in Hannover in 1996.
From: Plate Lunch, PO Box 1503,
D-53585, Bad Honnef, Germany*

Vittorio Gelmetti, *Musiche Elettroniche* Italy, Nepless CO 971 1003 (1997)

Grandi! Five long tracks of vintage 1960s electronic compositions you can't afford to live without. Vittorio Gelmetti (1926-1992) was an Italian modernist who produced some excellent electronic music in his time, excited and inspired by the possibilities of that medium right from

the start when the new technologies became available, and an aesthetic started to develop in his country. He made recordings in Rome in 1963 and 1964 at the Laboratory of Electro-Acoustics, and in Florence at Studio S2 FM. The first two fruits of this investigation, provided on this CD, were *Treni d'onda a modulazione d'intensita* and *Modulazioni per Michelangelo*; both are shining examples of strangely static abstract music, characterised by a hard and indigestible purity of sound, like eating alabaster for lunch. *Treni d'onda* builds up into a solid wave of oppressive textures, gradually increasing - not in volume or speed, but simply in sheer density, until you're completely walled in by a pale yellow fog. *Modulazioni* seems to promise more open space, but it's no less claustrophobic - all sounds are threaded along a single bleak high monotone, that keeps you hovering in the air like a kestrel above the motorway, while other sound events pass by below. The tension induced by listening is appalling, but habit-forming - inducing a most delicious restlessness.

These two works were elaborated utilising mathematical structures, but unlike an obsessive serialist Gelmetti used a simple, transparent and highly economical technique. Number grids were used to determine each sound element - the frequency of a sound wave, and the distribution of its modulation and intensity. The generation of exponential growth on a graph, translated into music - which might account for that relentless build-up factor mentioned above. Each composition is described simply as 'for magnetic tape', and though you might suspect the presence of synthesisers or even computer technology (we know how fond computers are of performing repetitive number-crunching operations), Gelmetti certainly never found a way into using the latter. Nor was he drawn to the harsh strictures of his contemporaries, the Post-Webern formalist serialist composers who were in evidence in the mid-1960s; rather, he believed in the human expressionist possibilities of the new electronic music. He believed it could be a new language, and that a structuralism-influenced mode of



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composition could be a new way of ordering music. It is partly this commitment to a utopian idealism that sets him apart, makes his music so fresh and exciting even today. There's a very strong sense of an enjoyable surface to all these pieces, something denied by some severe modernists as being too 'expressionistic'. Gelmetti conquers the alienating abstractions of modern systems music and imbues his work with a rich emotion and meaning all of his own.

The booklet notes here by Nepless staffer Andrea Cernetto sketch in a biography of Gelmetti, a task hard to complete as there are few people in the music scene who knew him well - he found himself isolated from the more traditional [classical] concert music-makers, because he didn't trust in the written score as much as they did. He believed 'music is made to be listened to' and that the essence of the work is not to be found in the bars and staves printed on a page. Born in Milan, he spent his childhood in Veneto and later settled in Rome where he pursued his interests in many diverse strands of cultural activity - poetry, theatre and painting. Then, by application to poring over their sheet music and playing records, he taught himself the principles of music through studying Stravinsky, Webern and Bartok - the 'big three' who he considered his spiritual forefathers. In the 1960s and 1970s there followed a rich and varied musical career, with interesting collaborative projects in the fields of theatre, dance, cinema, radio and television. He composed the soundtrack music for Michelangelo Antonioni's 1965 film *Red Desert* - said (by those who have seen it) to be a classic case study in mental illness and urban alienation. Even the film's sound effects of belching smoke chimneys are generated electronically by Gelmetti. Pere Ubu's steelyard blues have yet another forefather...

Nous irons a Tahiti, *Traumdeutung* and *L'opera abbandonata*... on this CD are examples of Gelmetti's tape collage and treatment methods - *Nous irons* in particular using very ordinary source material (organ and string music, voices off the radio) to produce something very far from ordinary. Such transformation is of course describes the process and aims of much pictorial collage this century - from John Heartfield and Max Ernst onwards. Fans of the first Mothers of Invention LPs are advised to cock an ear or two here. These pieces date from the later 1960s, but after the mid-1970s Gelmetti made increasing use of samples of found musical fragments - in which the listener's memory

played an important role. *Traumdeutung* uses human voices as part of the mix, combined with some eerie drones to suggest a very sinister sweetness. Nowhere near as portentous as Stockhausen's voice and electronic works, nor as restlessly sample-swapping as today's young experimentalists, these pieces are far more narrative (in a very disjunctive way) than the early building-block simplicity of his mid-1960s works.

Of course, it's a mistake to pin down Gelmetti as an exclusively electronic musician, as he also used tape alongside more conventional instruments and orchestration in pieces from 1967 onwards - for example *Organum Quadruplum*, which used tape with choir and organ; or the more chaotic-sounding *Karawane*, which boasted tapes, voices, mixed choir, flute, organ, objects - and audience participation (the John Cage influence is detectable here). But it would be even more of a mistake to neglect this important composer altogether. I certainly feel bad about it - you can all do a lot worse than start to correct the deficiency by buying this CD.

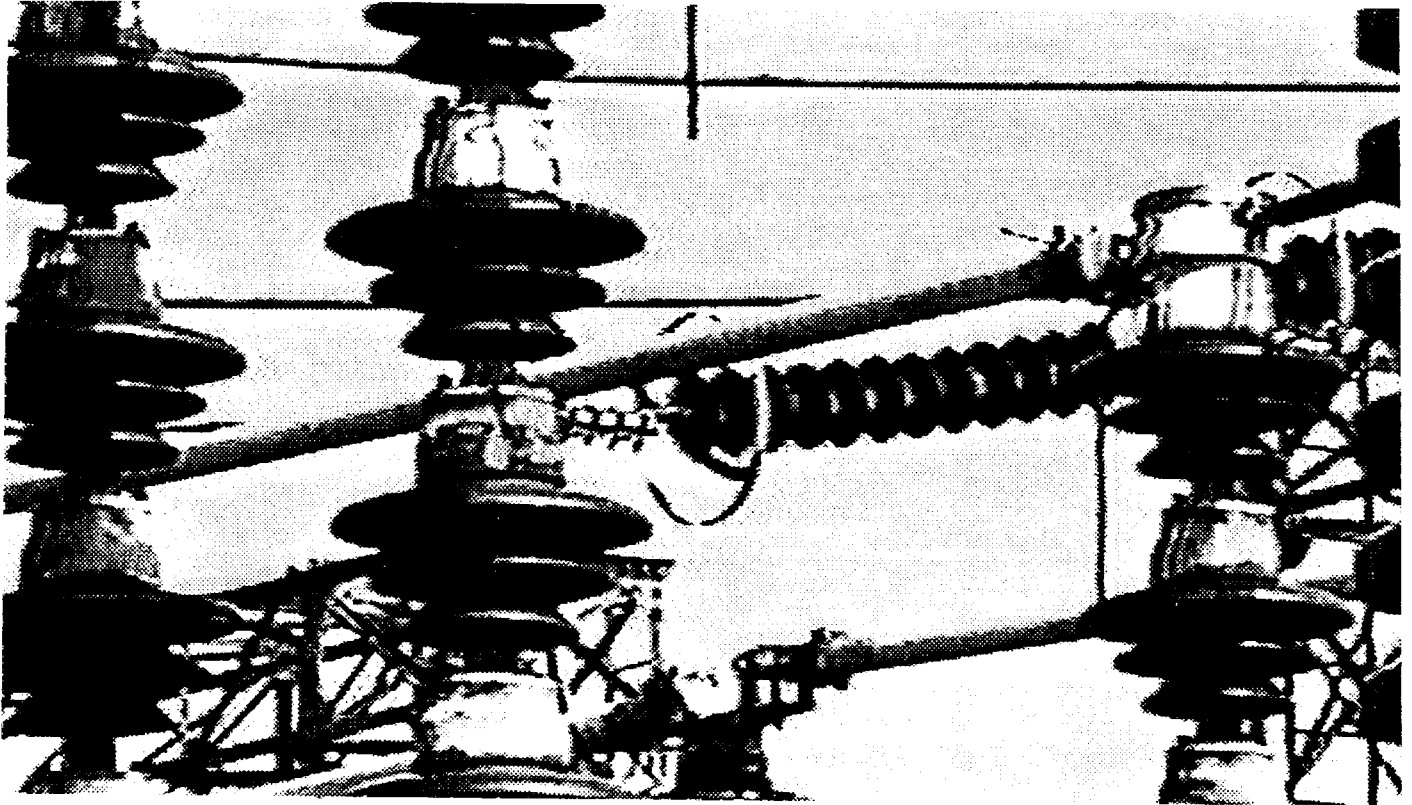
Ask, *Disconnected Bliss* DISCUS 8 CD (1998)

Everything AND the kitchen sink. Mixing and transposing a whole range of musical genres and styles, yet the whole wide-ranging stew is generated by a mere two ridiculously talented players. As a duo, Martin Archer and John Janosch have been associated since their days in Bass Tone Trap, an electric jazz combo; they've continued to explore genres of Jazz, improvisation and free music where they learned their virtuoso soloing techniques - the latter very evident here on the track 'Harvest Blade'. Archer has been successfully polishing his skills in the electronica / Ambient / Techno areas for some years, alongside his interest in home-made clutter instruments like any English eccentric modelling themselves after Hugh Davies or Tony Oxley.

This time around, it's the 'sounds of electronic rock music transposed into new contexts' that have become the blueprint for a further frenzy of mixing and matching. Effectively this results in the relentless onslaught of the first track 'If this is your world you can keep it', wherein Janosch lays down lumbering guitar solos over a rather clumsy rhythm track that wants to be funky, but is slightly afraid of



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being so obvious. Plus some weird synths doing something totally unco-ordinated in the background. The whole thing makes one tremendous din and takes 13 minutes to go precisely nowhere. This combo of guitar + synth is intended as a tribute to Richard Pinhas and Heldon (who did it much better).

Since Martin and John have been at it since 1980, you'd think by now they might have got their act together better than this. I sense a lack of rapport which makes for the odd dreary spell. It takes ages for a session to warm up after the obligatory feeling-your-way-round introduction, and even when they do the piece is by no means guaranteed to catch fire. They tolerate each other's flabbiness too often. My chief problem is with John Jasnoch, who is quite simply a showoff - far too proficient on the guitar and intent on letting everyone know. These may be 'free atonal' guitar solos, but that's just the form he takes - in spirit they're just as objectionable and meaningless as anything by Boston, Rush, Cheap Trick or any old 1970s guitar hero.

More effective by far is 'Disconnected Bliss', which works when they ease up on the twiddly bits and allow a bit more silence to work with as a dynamic; it features a fusion-styled drum and cymbal programme playing against a Stockhausen treated piano, followed by a mellow acoustic guitar (like Paco Lucia got drunk and wandered into the wrong session). One wonders if unrelated improvisations or random procedures were used to arrive at this elegant chaos; it may be disconnected, but is it bliss? Another enjoyable moment is 'Amber Leaf Prism', where Janosch acts like a missing member of the Magic Band trying to demonstrate a connection between Hawaiian slide guitar, bluegrass, Chinese theatre orchestra and the Pibroch pipes. On 'DNA Stepper' we have a few serene moments of miniature electronic brushstrokes and wash effects, suggesting the sound of the wind and the wind chimes together. This is surely Martin

Archer doing what he does best, squeezing out the delicate tones from his synths as only he can do.

Disinformation, R&D 2 **Ash International [RIP] # Ash 9.2**

Beautiful, majestic. A near-definitive statement from this unique documentary recordist and sound artist. This collection of further Research and Development investigations comprises 'Space Physics, Atmospheric Electricity and Geomagnetism', and I guarantee your whole being will be given such a shaking that your soul will vibrate back into tune with your lost cosmic brother ... you will find (particularly on the recordings of the National Grid or solar emissions, for example) that you are hearing something bigger than you are, a massively scaled thing that will crowd you out of your house. It's something so apart from everyday experience, and yet in such a different league to any contrived 'Cosmic' music that a thousand space-cadet festival Gong fans would be crushed to death by it. The intentions of Joe Banks are quite removed from any of that, almost nothing to do with making music.

The somewhat self-effacing Banks once laughingly said that if anyone went and bought the same powerful radio equipment he had, they could produce the same effects easily. Perhaps it's just the extreme amplification that makes it seem like a gigantic form of feedback music to some people. Banks feels his methods are quite transparent, and lists (with meticulous precision and detail) all the sound sources and the equipment he used to monitor them; in the same way, Ordnance Survey map references are given for the sites of antiquated military research that he visits. Only on track 16, 'National Grid', can I detect any evidence of a gestural intervention from the artist, as he modifies the sound 'live' using an upper and lower slide-band morse code filter.

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I'm persuaded that this is more than just achieving an effect. It's arguable that most of the other recordings are simply documents, without intervention. But - breathtakingly - what an astounding *scale* everything is conceived on. A piece can include an unwitting 'collaboration' from passing trains (identified with the usual precision as Network South East or Eurostar vehicles), or the Royal Navy sending out signals to nuclear submarines; their interventions vary the noise signals and 'contribute' to the piece. The United Kingdom can thus be seen as a large network of mundane and functional activities, all unco-ordinated and unrelated to each other, until Banks intercepts the electric signals they happen to generate and captures them in his Disinformation Net. This is (I would claim) more than simply serendipity, but an artistic intervention with a near-invisible aspect of the environment on a large scale, generating formidably powerful artworks. If anyone comes close, it might just be Christo with his Running Fence or wrapping projects.

Banks has an interesting tale of artist-engravers being employed during the Second World War to forge banknotes, in a bid by one side to unsettle the other's economy. In wartime, governments will invest heavily in scientific ideas if they might lead to victory. The situation can generate interesting side developments in all fields; the Internet is the most obvious example, conceived as a communications network that would still be in place in the event of nuclear war. A slightly more prosaic example is the development of avant-garde cinema in America. The US Army had invested heavily in 16mm film-making (to make training films, and documentaries); after VJ Day, surplus equipment and stock then became available to civilians at a very affordable price. Hence, Jordan Belson, Kenneth Anger, Harry Smith, Maya Deren, Bruce Baillie et al could afford equipment, and the beginnings of an artist's cinema were made possible. In my mind I connect these things with some of Disinformation's spheres of interest - the way that new (artistic) things can spring from something dedicated to a totally unrelated application. In short, Banks can make music from the dying embers of the Cold War - and thankfully refusing the foolish, speculative paranoia detectable in the IrDial-Discs set of Numbers Stations recordings. Ruins of the sound mirrors are pictured on the sleeve of this CD, stills from the strangely moving Antiphony Video Supplement; these are remains of the RAF Air Defence experimental acoustic early-warning system.

Various Artists, *T_ZERO_3* Touch Sampler.3 (1998)

Terrific compilation of aural exotica-philés and sonic scientists associated with Mr Mike Harding's Touch Label, here's a stimulating combination of musical and environmental recordings, all spliced together with strange and interesting fragments in between. It's a library of exotic and unusual documents, a species of aural voyeurism. Quite simply, these sounds are amazing; they could reawaken even the most entropic braindead moron to the wonders and mysteries of the world - so many things which we simply take for granted or overlook, capable of producing such astonishing sound events. One of my personal favourites is the environmental taping here of the British Library round reading room, a document that comes with an added dimension of sadness since this particular feature of British life, history and heritage is now a thing of the past. So it is meet that someone had the foresight to add this to our collective archive of memories. This is the end piece from a tripartite collage by Jon Wozencroft, starting with the old

man in his attic finding a 'converter', leading to the found poetry of a language school lesson from the airwaves.

The unassuming Chris Watson is here with three minutes of atmospheric recording from Zambesi, filled with sunlight and recommended listening to start the day with; he later resurfaces with 'Demonic Laughter' courtesy of a lively magpie jay. Chris has travelled extensively on account of his career in cinema production; the unadulterated recordings he fetches back from his adventures are, strictly speaking, almost peripheral to his purpose, yet they amount to more than a taped diary - their utter vividness makes the listener into a traveller too. Likewise, the two central segments of ethnic music on this disc - one heavenly episode of Temple Gamelan music (recorded in 1983), and six tracks of African music from the Bagamoyo Group of Tanzania, recorded (at Holland Park in London) in 1984. Given the currently hep status of this strain of 'World' music just now, you'd be foolish to pass up a listen to these irresistible rhythms, and the deeply pleasing sound of the 9-string isezere here.

After the African solace the CD goes wild - entering a noisy, dirty chaos zone as embodied by the near-incoherence of Rehberg and Bauer, Farmers Manual and Bruce Gilbert's horrifying 'Voice' cut-ups. Truly, these are manifestations of electronic glossolalia from possessed spirits. These are spliced either side of Joe Banks performing Disinformation 'live' from an event at the Museum of Installation, a heavy bass drone in all probability generated by the National Grid.

Linking fragments are possibly taken from domestic objects, familiar everyday items going mad before our very ears. The TV set (obviously) beams out strange messages; the refrigerator hums ominously or comfortingly. This latter sound phenomenon has been noticed by Akita Masami as 'interesting' that people have recently discovered to be music, and by Robert Crumb as a potent reminder of one's mortality in his Existentialist one-page comic strip. I'd be disappointed to learn it's not a fridge at all, so let me cherish my illusions. This domesticity-subverted factor extends to the old retired couple clearing out the attic (see above), a similar document not heard since Alvaro recorded his German wife Hildegard reciting her recipe while baking brown bread, as a filler for side two of his second LP.

Unofficial title for this comp has to be 'Teleform' - analysed to mean something new, Tele = 'recording at a distance' and Form = 'having the shape of'. These pieces were all recorded from the margins of life, by quiet and unassuming artists observing the miracles from the borderlines. This mix carefully selects items that display the most worrisome and alarming emotions alongside the most reassuring and relaxing, with very little in between. Touch releases are among the gentlest and least aggressive in the world, surely a welcome balm to the torrent of banal MTV-styled youth culture that is increasingly becoming inescapable.

The World is so full of a number of things ... I'm sure we should all be as happy as Kings.

Farmers Manual, *Explorers_We* OR # squish 4 (1998)

Dance Music for the clinically insane. This is experimentation of such mad extremes that you sometimes wonder why other lesser people in the field are even bothering. War Arrow just heard it and sat here transfixed, delighting in the fact that 'everything was going completely wrong' and that it was virtually impossible to connect the machine-driven illogical noises with anything human beings might do. It reminded him of the qualities he always admired in favourite

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Industrial music. Personally I love every minute of it, and I like the way Farmers Manual can still annoy some people who consider themselves broadminded musically, yet they will lose patience after only a few minutes with what they hear as aimless and formless self-indulgence. Why not simply surrender to the outrageous wit and be entertained by the sheer daringness of the deranged adventures here catalogued?

On the other hand, it's not hard to see why this might be construed as somehow alienating. As suggested above, it's inhuman; at no point does this music ever resemble anything like the sound of a drum or programmed bass or even a comforting piano sample. Instead, rhythms (of a sort, at any rate) are generated from weird loops, or volume knobs applied to amplifier hum, skipping CDs, and great gobs of deadly reverb and echo applied like fertiliser with fiendish glee by the Farmers Boys. Verily, it seems like every electronic gimmick available to the modern music-maker becomes a plaything for mischief in their hands - all part of the gigantic toy train-set that must be wrecked. The cumulative result of this is frightening - it will undoubtedly warp many a young mind. It is a Chinese puzzle of unfathomable, evil, random-generated nonsense which strands the hapless listener in the furthest reaches of the Back of Beyond. Just right for a night of 'You Call That Music!!' with the Radio 3 *Mixing It* boys.

A double CD set, of which *Explorers-We* has been embedded with 60 index points; if you have a random-play facility you can take part in the general insanity by making even more chaos from the debris. The 2nd Live disc comprises two recordings from some obscure festivals in Europe, described as 'computer mediated...live jam human triggered parameter changes'. All I can say is I'm surprised they got away with doing it in a public place without being lynched, but then it's comforting for me to hear such far-flung eccentricity thriving in a world where the Normals are gaining more ground every day.

Morphogenesis, Formative Causation **Mycophile SPOR 02 (1997)**

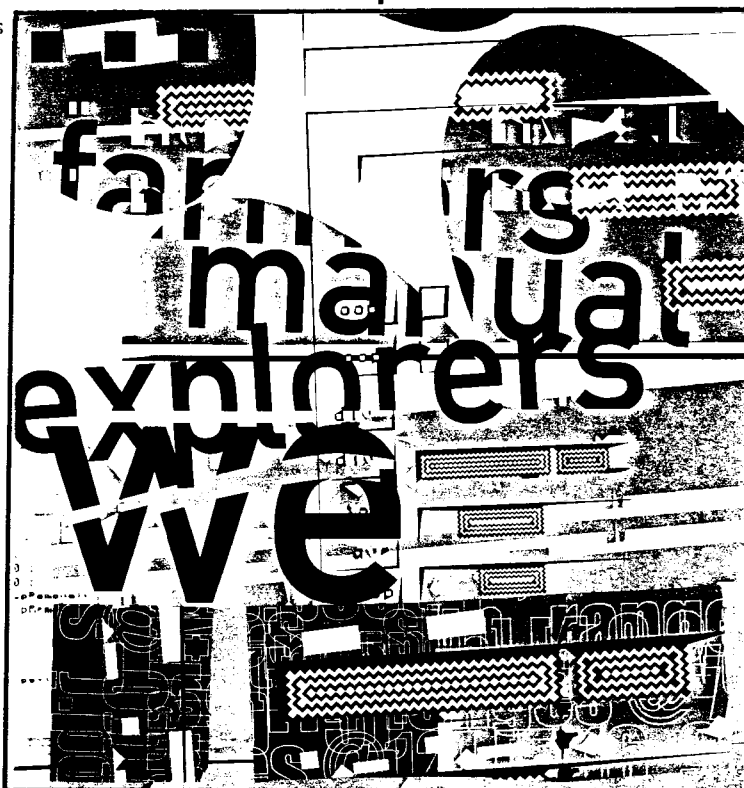
What a guy this Michael Prime - in one sense perhaps he's the main man behind the 'Morphsters', but really they're a group combining improvisation, abstract noise, electro acoustic, found tapes and all-purpose electronics in a glorious washy laundry-spin, with the only proviso that everything be done live and without overdubs. Prime is interested in biology of plant life - hence the band name which relates to the process of organic growth. He has a

machine called a bio-activity translator that enables you to 'hear' the sound of a plant growing - it converts the energies created via photosynthesis into audible electrical impulses.

The music of Morphogenesis is indeed everything you'd expect from this - a total organic mulch, and incredibly slow-moving as though the collective thought processes of the six musicians have scaled down to the same microscopic level. (And see Brandon Labelle's micro-organism trippery, below). Whatever shortcomings as a record-playing experience there may be arise not from a listener's impatience, but from a feeling of confinement, being trapped inside this glutinous veil which obscures and obstructs some other, unseen movements. That's an effective achievement, really; for an hour or so you see things through their eyes, sucked into a intensive world-view, a rather scary miniature universe. Everything here recorded in 1986, added to the Morphogenesis tape archive and not released until 1997 - with the combined talents of Adam Bohman, Roger Sutherland, Clive Hall, Fred Sansom and Ron Briefel.

Prime made some great solo records which I think you can only get on vinyl. *Fructification* (Mycophile MYC 01, from 1989) is a magic-mushroom masterpiece, a bite of which even Alice in Wonderland would have passed up. It features other dimensions of his interest in environmental sounds, nature sounds, even the vibrations of cell movements - anything which can't normally be perceived by yon human

lug, hence we have here a faulty machine to measure the ultrasonic yelps of our soar-driven friends, the leathery-handed bats ... and magnetic forces from a cave in Somerset interacting with short-wave radio signals. Crawl inside this one some Sunday afternoon and try life among the protozoa ... it's a very cellular song.



idbattery, last blue before black

**USA, Unique
Ancient Tavern CD
(no number) (1998)**

Another outstanding CD from Brandon

Labelle, hot on the heels of the exquisite *Prima Materia* which we looked at last ish. This is a series of virtually abstract environment recordings, processed at some stage (perhaps during the recording, even). The opener for example sounds like a contact mike was placed inside a basketball and dribbled remorselessly about a hardwood floor for fifteen minutes. Two points. Surrender to the flow and you'll be guaranteed a sublime experience, washed over with surreal and benign sheets of translucency - even your Mothercare relaxation tapes won't help you here, young mums. Sound events seem magnified, drawn out to infinity;

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this is almost a microscopic examination of the possibilities inherent in every atom in motion within the universe. Malcolm Le Grice pointed out (a little glibly) how he could make hours of film documenting what had been happening inside a room during the space of a two-minute conversation, focussing on the tiny 'insignificant' details the other film-makers aren't interested in. Labelle shrinks us to the size of a microbe; play this CD and enjoy your adventures crawling across the surface of the carpet. A beautiful see-through sleeve; last ish we observed how abstract electronic music (as in the Ash International trilogy) seems to paste a transparency over the world to steer us by, which is what Labelle has done here with his map, his stars of Dante, his Alchemist's hands reaching for the Philosopher's Stone.

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correct any imbalances you may perceive in my side of the affair. It is a penetrating critique of socio-political injustice and hostility of the first water. It's a wonder they haven't locked him up yet.

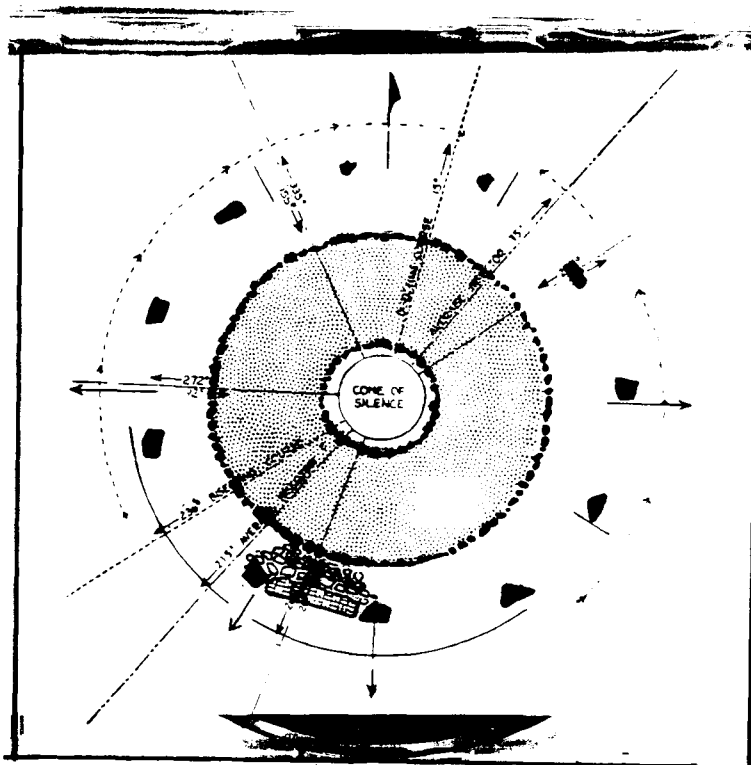
The Fence refers to things like The Berlin Wall, the border between Russia and Finland, and The Peace Line in Belfast. Eleven sound-episodes here (mixtures of documentary recordings and invented texts) delineate such international examples of 'everything that separates, controls and isolates the human race', framed within some of the most moving and chilling electronic violin music yet issued in digital form. *The Fence* also refers to Jon Rose's chosen instrument, the violin, and his self-constructed 20-metre long variations on this instrument. These massive stringed monsters were modelled on outback fences in Australia; the ones charged with high-voltages produce very interesting sounds when the wind blows. Aeolian music, to which La Monte Young is no stranger.

Less obvious perhaps is Rose's oblique comment on Eastern Europe and the sudden release of hostilities there some few years ago, a post-war tension never satisfactorily resolved. Traces are to be found in the high farce and grotesque satire of *Bagni di Dolabella*, the second suite on this CD. The connection between Bosnia Herzegovina and a dissatisfied bath attendant may not be immediately obvious, until you remember the ghastly term 'ethnic cleansing' that was used by Bosnian war criminals to justify the untold slaughter of their fellows. In fact this music is 'A Violinist's Guide to the treatments and political intrigues of an Ancient Roman Bath', extracted from a wholly falsified document, and played by Rose under a pseudonym. There are sound effects of fat, fleshy tissue being massaged, descriptions of the chemical properties of the water (a concept quickly degraded into bathing in pig's urine), strung together by garish satirical pastiches of baroque music. A 1993 studio piece performed on a radio show called The Audio Box, unless that's another spoof.

The other works of Jon Rose (expatriate Englishman living in Australia) are not known to me, but all sound like they might be a bit tacky. *Violin Music in the Age of Shopping*

purports to be a critique of consumerism, but is likely just a flip-side to the cringe-inducing antics of Dame Edna. Other recordings comprise spoof radio dramas and operas like *Brain Weather* (with Shelley Hirsch and Phil Minton). The subversive charms of these would probably be wasted on an impatient listener like myself. Even so he can play the violin and make beautiful and unusual sound collages like this CD. With his distancing devices and distractions like disinformation, bogus facts, nasty jokes and traps for the unwary listener, Rose nails some home truths. Investigative journalists and diplomatic politicians have tried to explain or

resolve the miserable world situations outlined above, and failed; as usual, it falls to artists and musicians to face the truth and communicate it honestly and directly. Instead of switching on the news, listen to Jon Rose.



Jon Rose, *The Fence*
ReR. JR5 (1998)

Jon Rose is known as an international trouble-maker; his arrival at any airport spreads consternation amongst the security staff, who direct him to stand still while they strip-search him and pass a metal detecting wand over his naked body. Rose's normal response under these circumstances is to seize the device from his tormentor's grasp and play it like a pocket Theremin, hooking it up to his violin and interactive computer electronics systems. The resulting entertainment, having been recorded by some passing tourist on his camcorder, quickly assumes a certain illicit status as tape copies circulate on the black market. If you doubt the core of truth within this fanciful account, then it behooves you to listen to this CD and

health & efficiency
repeat
health & efficiency / repeat

War Arrow's Skipload of Tapes

Hoogwater, *Fckn Bstrds Package* Detritus / cassette C30 assemblage, Hoogwater Prods (1997)

Thanks to which, my **Skipload of Tapes** briefly came to resemble the sort of skip found in the streets in close proximity to building works. The box happily informs me that I have been chosen by computer to receive this package. How honoured I felt, as its contents spilled out onto the worksurface I had cleaned only half an hour before. Emptying the contents of one's dustbin into a jiffy bag and sending it to a complete stranger may raise a chuckle, but loses its magic after a while. Contents include: unreadable A5 art comic book #1 (collages and suchlike); unreadable A5 art comic #2 (scrawled cartoons); a cotton bud with hardened yellow effluvia (paint!) covering one tip; length (approx. 3 foot) of damaged 1/4" magnetic tape; poorly exposed photograph of a back garden; some staples; page from an unknown play torn from a textbook, featuring characters called Pikkum, Koopman, Elsie, Matrozen and Burgers; sandpaper with hairs stuck to it by red paint; assorted doodles on five loose pages of various sizes; indeterminate matter - possibly soil, or crunched breakfast cereal; a cassette tape.

This did not bode well. So far as I'm concerned, art is what one finds in the National Gallery. You can tell what it's supposed to be! I'll concede also that Marcel Duchamp had his moments. Ho-hum. I considered phoning the Council to see if they'd come and take it away. They politely declined, so I was forced to listen to the cassette.

Surprisingly, and happily, the actual music isn't bad. A low-budget Merzbow arguing with Nurse With Wound over a nice cardigan at a jumble sale. All tape noise, and vertiginously edited lumps of electronic things going wrong. Not exactly *Heartbeat* soundtrack fodder, but nonetheless engaging while it lasts. This said, whilst listening to this I experienced difficulties with my washing machine - the door refused to open and I was stricken with dark visions of my four favourite shirts being entombed within for the best part of the weekend. This may have enhanced my listening experience - its providing a suitably stressful soundtrack to the proceedings. Not bad. Full marks for the sounds, but the packaging is rubbish, and I mean that both objectively AND subjectively.

*Hoogwater, PO Box 68, 7700AB,
Dedemsvaart, Holland*

Pol Silentblok, *Pour le Sourire d'Alexia* C60 Cassette, Red Neon Tapes RN18

Readers may recall another Red Neon Tape in the previous issue - this was *Pummel Box* by a mysterious (and talent-free) entity known only as The Moth. It was probably the worst cassette I will ever hear, but I had a nagging suspicion that Red Neon Tapes weren't all bad. I wondered if my memory was playing jester to my senses. Had perhaps

some dull opiate, in vile unison with the ferric horror that now assailed my very being, painted a rose-hued panorama populated by previous releases on the Red Neon label? Was my claim made only to alleviate the guilt borne by one who finds it his distasteful duty to deliver such a thorough tar-and-feathering?

Memory did not fail me. Red Neon do have some fine sounds, of which this is one. I'll admit it isn't ALL brilliant, so here's the bad stuff first. Most of side two - which is taken up by short song-style instrumentals. In Pol's favour these are evidence of a formidable familiarity with the art of programming. Razor-sharp hi-hat sounds, blippy sequencers, hyperactive snares - all cascade around the ears in a manner resembling an explosion in a cutlery factory which (by the same twist of fate that allows monkeys to write Shakespeare) has magically transformed itself into a melody. Unfortunately many of the melodies waver uncertainly between the sort of Front 242 that it's safe to introduce to your Granny, and the worst excesses of Eurovision Song. More cheese than something that's like, really cheesy. Another of Pol's shortcomings is the relatively restricted sound palette. I think I recognised a Yamaha SPX90 effects unit, and I can't place the drum machine, but it sounds very familiar. To his credit, these shortcomings aren't always allowed to detract from Pol's music.

Such trifles aside, there is much here that shows promise. One hopes that this isn't the last we will hear from Mr Silentblok. The lengthy 'Souviens-toi d'une Musique Circulaire', which takes up the first side of the tape, utilises a very simple idea, percussive sounds put through a very long echo, to great effect. It's thoroughly hypnotic. If LaBradford weren't absolutely bobbins, they might sound something like this. But they are, so they don't.

*Red Neon, c/o Patrick Parent, 76 Rue Wayenberg,
1040 Bruxelles, Belgium*

Konstruktivists, *Kontraband* C60 cassette, Old Europa Cafe OEC068 (1996)

Sigh ... yet another best-kept secret that few of you will be familiar with. Konstruktivists have been going for a long, long time. They've produced albums, singles, CDs, tapes. They've played live. They even collaborated with Chris and Cosey on the Hammer House EP, which ironically is probably that particular lovable duo's finest waxing.

'But', I hear you enquire, 'if they're so blummin' fab, how come I've never heard of them?' Good question - sure beats the shit out of me. Publicity (which has never been a strong point in the Konstruktivists' arsenal) may be the answer. Certainly the quality of their music can't be blamed. NKVD, the curiously monickered big cheese of the group, is nothing if not prolific. It would seem all the man has to do is break wind, only to find he's produced another album. Konstruktivists seem to casually fart out new material of the

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quality that others only produce after years of hard labour. Sadly, Konstruktivists' low profile makes it difficult for the vast majority of their work to make it to an appropriate medium. Thank heavens then, for tapes - and labels like Old Europa Cafe.

Kontraband is a fascinating mixed bag comprising versions of tracks from *Jihad E Sazendegi* (the missing fifth album between *Glennascaull* and *Forbidden*) along with some live excerpts, and more recent material. Perhaps the music here may be best described as a dark rhythmic excursion into the more obscure recesses of electronic film noir. But that sounds a bit wanky, and hardly does the group justice. The fleeting influences of Yello, Muslimgauze (on 'Jesus Wants You'), John Carpenter ('Kandyman'), Clock DVA, Heldon, and even John Barry, are vaguely discernible to these ears, without the music ever appearing derivative. The atmosphere is rich, mysterious.

Old Europa Cafe seem a particularly commendable and eclectic label. I'm unsure as to the contents of their most recent catalogue, but their past proffering of fine works by the likes of Zoviet*France, The Legendary Pink Dots and De Fabriek should be sufficient to illustrate the merit of further investigation.

*Old Europa Cafe, V.le Marconi
38, 33170 Pordenone, ITALY*

More, Beauty Killer **C60 cassette**

Various artists, September 1997

C30 cassette, Old Gold (1997)

Firstly, I apologise to those concerned if the details above are incorrect, but so vague are the covers of these works that the artist's appellation, the title of the masterpiece, and the name of the tape label, are indistinguishable. The *September 1997* cassette may actually be the work of a particular individual or group, rather than a compilation - I just can't tell. 'Tis a mystery that would surely tax James Burke himself.

Confusing authorship aside, these tapes, whoever recorded them, aren't bad. The music is largely instrumental improvisation from a fairly typical rock line-up, and surprisingly tuneful in places. Some sections intrude dangerously into pastures of jazz - and not feeling adequately qualified to comment upon this area, I can only offer a comedy turn to camera two, and a gravel-voiced 'niice'. (Apologies to overseas readers who may not appreciate the full jocularity of this reference.) The standard of performance in evidence here is darn fine, and suitably eclectic, with the occasional flute or sax (and even a xylophone) brought into the proceedings, to an almost Faust-y effect. The token minor flaw of this music is that most of it sounds to be recorded on a ghetto-blastar, so the ditties (although clear) are heard as though on a good rehearsal tape. This doesn't detract greatly, but I'm sure even a Portastudio sound would allow the group to breathe a little more.

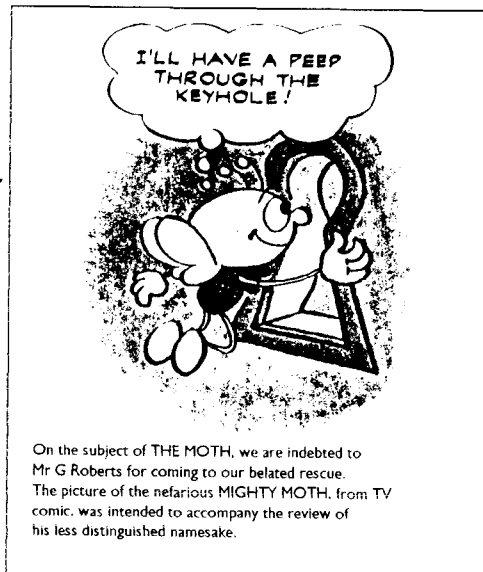
Particular attention should be drawn to one of the few pieces with a lyrical content. This is the first track on *September 1997* which is either called '2 Geniuses', or else is

recorded by a duo of that name (I just can't tell) - either way under the circumstances it's an appropriate and well-deserved description. A vaguely disturbed bluesy guitar accompanies a lone maniac's heartfelt discourse on the merits of American style pro-wrestling. It would be pointless to transcribe the wonderful lyrics here, as they should be heard for their full impact, but needless to say I came close to trouser-soiling hysterics. The suggestion that High School wrestling should be conducted like Pro-wrestling, so you could come to school dressed as a giant bird, is surely worthy of serious consideration, and this one atonal gem alone merits the purchase of this cassette.

Old Gold, PO Box 8776, Atlanta, GA 31106, USA

Dot, Evidence 6/3/89 **C90 cassette, OKOK Society (1996)**

I'm unsure as to the relevance of reviewing what is essentially a spoken word tape within the confines of a magazine that concerns itself primarily with music. However, this was sent unsolicited and without explanation, and isn't entirely dissimilar to the *Crucible of Tearer* cassette which received notice in issue 2. So here goes...



As with the Old Gold material above, the distinction between authorship and title is a little obscure, so the header of this review is largely guesswork on my part. *Evidence 6/3/89* comes in a clear polythene bag, recorded on a prestigious Waltham brand cassette - not actually a C90, but a W90! Hand-made and rubber-stamped artwork seem to suggest that each fruit of the OKOK Society's collective loins is a unique piece of art, exclusive to its recipient. A promising introduction of rumbling and ominous electronics opens side one, followed, rather disappointingly, by 89 minutes of rambling anecdotal material in a mumbling style. Rumbling random rambling mumbling, if you will. Art type subjects covered include penises

(ahem), car boot sales (which may explain the use of prestigious Waltham brand W90 audio technology), the National Lottery, dead cats, and so forth. I am reminded of one of the two things ever written by columnist Garry Bushell that I found myself in agreement with - this being his humorous and disparaging remarks about Yoko Ono's film of bums (incidentally the other was his love of Sham 69, which is of little relevance here - more's the pity). As with Yoko's bottytastic epic, or even Andy Warhol's less populist works, so with Dot - it's all very well doing this kind of thing, but I fear it's a little presumptuous to assume that it should be of interest to others. This may or may not be art - to be frank I don't really care. As spoken word, it fails to hold its own against the mighty force of Henry Rollins. As art, it ain't no Botticelli. As 90 minutes of vaguely diverting material it fails to sink to the depths of awfulness attained by The Moth (as reviewed last issue), but that's hardly a recommendation.

*OKOK Society, 8 Rhes Victoria, Bethesda, Gwynedd,
Cymru LL57 3AG*

Sof Tillin's And, *Sof Tillin's And* Kylie Productions, C40 cassette (1997)

Something of a grower to the extent that repeated plays have shamed me into rewriting a pithy review (which may appear in the Director's Cut of *The Sound Projector 4*). Before blathering on aimlessly about the music, it should be mentioned that the cover, printed on acetate, is one of the most imaginative I've come across. That said, the audio content is of an equal standard. At first listen it's all fairly odd and skew-whiff. Weird little abstract sounds and tape edits meander around fuzzy guitar rifferama (a word I've always had the deepest respect for) and percussion that sounds like someone rattling a bucket of broken glass, and coming up with a rhythm by virtue of the old chimpanzee-typewriter-*Much Ado About Nothing* equation.

I've listened to this whilst cycling around a girl's school at lunchtime (for entirely innocent work-related reasons) and as an accompaniment to *Third Rock From The Sun* on the box with the sound turned down (obviously on the television, not on the tape) and on both occasions it seemed strangely appropriate. Having overcome the initial weirdness thrill, it occurs that much of this rocks like a considerably rocky item. Fine cranky kick-ass stuff. Innovative and quietly powerful.

Flat 1, 65 Deburgh Street, Cardiff CF1 8LB. Also from Kylie Productions, 509A Old York Road, Wandsworth, London SW18 1TF

Lode Runner, *Playmat* Racing Room Tapes, C25 cassette (1998)

Another offering from the entity whose *The Bubble Sort* was reviewed in the last Skipload as showing some promise - 'not the best pint that will be pulled at Lode Runner's musical tavern, but...the best is yet to come'. Uncannily, this prediction seems to be standing up to scrutiny. *Playmat* is clearly a work of the same author but lends itself less easily to the lazy comparisons made of its predecessor to the usual suspects. Cluster doing Nurse With Wound covers over films of the Straight and Curly bits from *Rainbow* are possibly still in there, but are much harder to find. Well, hardly worth looking for to be honest. *Playmat* is very much its own thing, if that isn't too Californian a way of putting it. To continue the spurious

brewery analogy, this is a formidably potent pint, with no evidence of watering down, and much to suggest that pipe cleanliness is taken very seriously at The Racing Room Arms. High quality audio weirdness and, with Konstruktivists, probably this Skipload's prize catch. Soon will come the day when I'll be able to lazily write 'sounds like Lode Runner'. Move over Mystic Meg, I'm coming through.

Racing Room Tapes, 37 Egmont Road, New Malden, Surrey KT3 4AT

Aquarello, *To Cover The Dark*

**Deep Wave, DWM001 C60
cassette (1993)**

Blummin Heck! I know Hans-Joachim Roedelius is virtually a living god and all, but this was a real struggle. Perhaps the Skipload's ears are so used to cranky, distorted (but heartfelt) efforts that such rich and smooth textures as we have here seem terrifically alien. Then again maybe this just isn't my cup of tea. Roedelius, of course, is not lacking in ability or inspiration, as was evident from a recent live recital he blessed us with at The Spitz club. Frankly, he was cooking with gas. I wanted to shout 'GEEZER!' in appreciation, but felt this was somehow inadequate to sum up the quality of such a performance. However, this...it's smooth, polished, expertly rendered and so on, but I can't help thinking of George Michael in an even more serious mood than usual - and that bloody saxophone doesn't help dispel this particular unpleasant image. For God's Sake! I wasn't expecting The Sex Pistols, but it'd be nice to know that the musicians were alive during recording. There's meditative and then there's this. Ambient music, to use that awful category, can at its finest make the most evocative and lovely use of your stereo speakers. Eno is an obvious name worthy of mention. Nocturnal Emissions' *Stoneface* album is another. My personal favourite is a cassette called *Methods* by Andrew Cox on which nothing really happens, but the effect is beyond words. Aquarello's music is evocative alright, but images of expensive Hampstead flats containing pine tables and scatter cushions from which the culturally bereft enjoy their Carla Lane situation comedies and

obscenely inflated advertising salaries, have never caused a commotion in my trousers. If you like this sort of thing you might enjoy this tape, but personally I find it too rich and stodgy, like being force-fed ten sherry trifles in quick succession.

Deep Wave, WOMAD shop, 3 The George Centre, Crewkerne, Somerset TA18 7JW

Manslaughter, *South of Hebburn*

**Abattoir Records, C30 cassette
(1993)**

As I write, ominous murmurings are announced on the radio, hinting at the depressing possibility that Geri may be leaving the Spice Girls. Although this issue will doubtless be resolved one way or another by the time this sees print, at present a sense of nagging futility, of the cruel uncertainty of the future, is almost tangible. Will they be as god without their Ginger component? Has the tree that produced such fine fruit as '2 become 1', 'Move Over' and 'Naked' (first album) been hewn and transformed into furniture by the solemn hand of destiny?

This brings us to Manslaughter, the world's number one Furniture Metal band. They alone are capable of providing a fitting soundtrack to these tenebrous times. Hopefully, some of you may have shown wisdom sufficient to prompt purchase of Manslaughter's previous tape (se last Skipload) and so will understand the full weight of truth in these words. Manslaughter afford a glimpse into the darkest corners of the soul, the musty regions of terror to which the group themselves have clearly paid one of two visits. No-one could doubt this after listening to 'Empty Wardrobe' or 'Sofa Bed of Doom'. Manslaughter fans will know what to expect here. There has been little progression since their last offering, but this isn't a criticism. They're a little more intense, as the terrifying 'Fitted Kitchen Related Cattle Mutilation Mystery' demonstrates. Also, their musicianship, which was never really in question, is even tighter. The result: a further batch of bone-crushing hard metal with one foot firmly planted in the charnel house, and the other in Sofaworld. Hail the pine shelving units of Lucifer, and send a 'couple of quid' to:

*Strange Daze publications,
2A East Cheap, Heaton,
Newcastle-upon-Tyne,
NE6 5UA*

this heat



Weird Science story (solution: he didn't know the radio set he was dismantling was actually an alien living organism). You will also be dragged through a succession of psychotic nightmares and dreams beyond your imagination.

At one time the simplicity of modern electromusic was niggling at me - everyone seems to do just one thing and explore it forever, and is that all there is to it? But this collection works, you see how each excavator is working with one specialist area of investigation and mining it for virtually every possibility. Whether it will lead anywhere might not be clear at this time, but it's not so much using up a natural resource (like strip-mining for gold), rather analysing the potential of one sound, one drone, one effect.

Possibilities are here for meditation and contemplation, even among the more intrusive and obnoxious tracks; there's enough room for everyone and everything here, even ghosts of bad memories and unwanted psychic visitors.

The packaging's quite a master-stroke. It requires you to unfold several hinged flaps before you can reach the records. This at first struck me as annoying, an ego-trip by some fold-happy paper designer (Rick Holtry of RPM, Brooklyn New York City), now I see it's obviously part of the deal - layers must be peeled away, doors opened, to get to the silver nugget within. At best, a good bit of 1970s gallery-centred conceptual art will invite you to perform a small ritual or movement -

Various Artists, *Release Your Mind Volume Two* USA, Release, RR 6961-2 triple CD (1997)

Featuring these artists: Vidna Obmana, Amber Asylum, Lull, Trial of the Bow, TUU, Ycn Pox, Mandible Chatter, Tribes of Neurot, The Joy of Disease, Subarachnoid Space, Hybryds, James Plotkin, Namanax, O Yuki Conjugate, Solarus, Tactile, Dissecting Table, Runzelstirn and Gurglestock, Pica, Bastard Noise, Con-Dom, Atrix Morgue, Last Satanic dance, Illusion of Safety, Brume, Smeli and Quim, Kapotte Muziek, Japanese Torture Comedy Hour, Haters, Skin Tribe, Kazumoto Endo and Masonna.

A BOLD AND BRILLIANT STATEMENT, celebrating aspects of the entire spectrum of experimental ambient and electronic music in the world today. *Release Your Mind* is edited and structured over three long

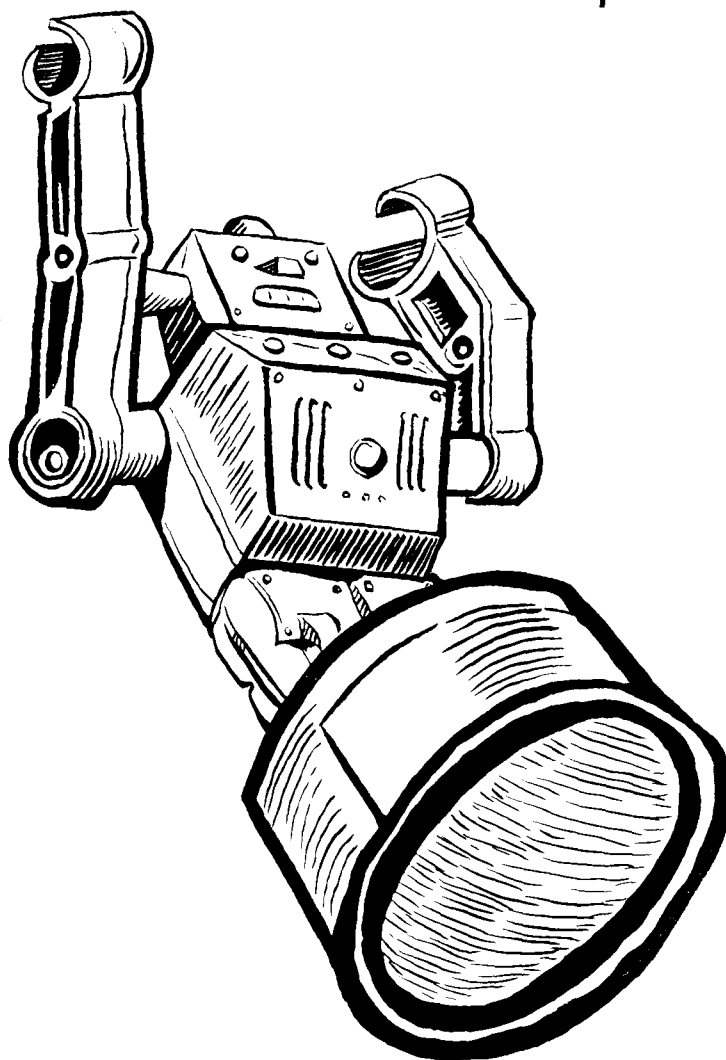
CDs within a narrative structure so that the 'nice' Ambient sounds start on Disc One, and the 'nasties' come in to take their revenge by Disc Three with a full payload of punishment. Within this framework your ears will have a field day; there's a full Cinorama smorgasbord of instrumental delights smeared in generous dollops between these two points. In terms of sheer sonic textures alone, I feel sure that if you managed to play this end to end you would not only put your stereo through the mincer but you will have experienced the entire range of signals audible to the human system - highest to the lowest frequencies. You might be taken apart and have your organs and nervous system laid out in schematic, as befell one victim in an EC

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like climbing a ladder (Yoko Ono) or walking in circles around a pile of stones (Richard Long) to actually view the piece. From the physical action might follow a new line of thought, different to what you might have entertained otherwise; a little stone placed in the stream to divert your mind, from which who knows where you will lead yourself. *Release Your Minds* first clever trick is thus to make you aware of the automatic gesture of taking a CD from its case - and showing you it's not as straightforward as you thought. The package unfolds into a virtual turquoise-skinned alien with three eyes; enough card to render it a segmented vinyl album cover. Like a Clive Barker magic box, warning you of the hidden corridors, trick entrances and concealed surprises awaiting you around the next corner in this House of Mystery.

Musically, *Release Your Mind* at first seems to offer no more than the straight linearity of its original promise. The friendly nature-boy drones, landscape painting and harmonious whirlpools of light of the first disc, leading into the whirling hall of knives Funhouse of disc two; which is where the pulsebeats and factory floor drum machines start to fade in, with foreign sampled sounds and darker chords mixed in with the melodic strains. Dubby effects; dynamics; the free-form Garden of Eden of Disc One is gradually giving way to structure, civilisation. Human voices start to appear as you near the middle of your quest, some radio-TV samples, some barely human treated groans; until by track 8 they become the voices of a madhouse, madmen screaming in terror overlaid with defenceless children under attack in the day-care centre. Then chaos reigns for two tracks; the fierce savage beauty of Bastard Noise. The feared Disc Three looms ahead of us, after which it's merely 60 minutes of a roller-coaster ride into the mouth of

Hades. A slow death and many colourful painful tortures all the way to the end. But a few more spins should convince you this linearity is in fact quite illusory; the listening event is circular, even crystalline in form; echoes of one piece appear in another, a sound on one disc is reflected or distorted on a second. Memory and nostalgia. Perhaps we are in fact being eaten alive by the same alien organism sealed in the middle of a huge diamond, through one facet he appears to be a microbe, through another a boa constrictor, yet he remains The Conqueror Worm in the final analysis.



Mouse on Mars - Scanner - Oval - Main - David Shea, Folds and rhizomes for Gilles Deleuze Sub Rosa, SR99 (1995)

Virtually a Mille Plateaux showcase, and almost a bit of a nostalgia trip for me, even though it's but three years old. Visually, here are those old standby 'enigmatic' juxtapositions of strange

black-and-white photographs on the covers, along with equally bewildering texts in French. Musically, it's another memory-lane treat - particularly with firm favourites Oval, here's good old Marcus Popp doing his thing with fucked-up CDs skipping and blipping merrily along. From a vintage year when he used to wreak his irresistible digital mayhem using a Stanley knife, rather than the somewhat more removed methods of manipulation he deploys nowadays. The old Hi-Fi adverts in the 1970s always warned us how all vinyl pressings were warped, to the extent that it represented a

roller-coaster ride to your poor old cartridge and stylus rig. Heaven knows what the CD laser beam makes of Oval's mutilations - one is tempted to try it at home using some ghastly CD but nobody I know has dared.

Cologne wunderkids Mouse On Mars (Andi Thoma and Jan St Werner) are likewise becoming welcome guests in this maison by the minute, we can number them among the truly warm and human

Techno-Minimalists (if there are others out there, let them draw near to my hearth). Perhaps they score in this because - unlike some puritanical anti-entertainment electrohermits - they nearly allow melodies to suggest themselves, via the use of modal scales in amongst all their other sequencer-happy larkings. Perhaps, like Ralf and Florian afore them, they've found that secret shortcut that lets them make the machines sing with a human voice. Mouse On

Mars are as happy as Jerry Mouse in his little snug mousehole complete with matchbox for a four-poster bed.

The highly proficient and prolific Main also notch up mega points on the pleasure pinball machine. These days Main (if still active?) are down to one guy, Robert Hampson who squeezes his musical career in between Krautrock-DJing at the Cosmische

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Club. 'Occlusion' here is when Main was a duo with Scott Dowson, and a tape collage blends jarring sound effects of doors slamming in corridors with the more familiar taut dronal semi-structured escapades. If you haven't investigated Main yet, I wouldn't leave it much longer.

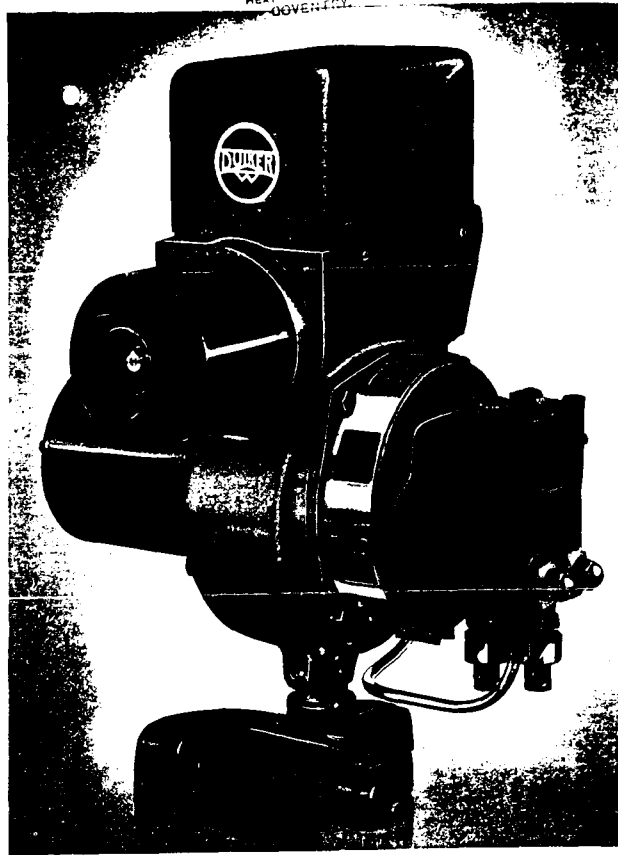
Even Scanner (Robin Rimbaud) used to be quite good, judging by this 'phantom signals with active band width' ditty, where those dumb samples from mobile phones he used to do take a back seat to some more aggressive swirls of mercury vapour cloud inhalants. Another nostalgic one as Scanner has likely moved on now, to assume perhaps a role as jet-setting media consultant to faceless moguls in the multi-tasking entertainment / software interface. You can just picture him riding the jet airliner to Australia, his ears plugged into the movie soundtrack simultaneously with his Walkman, with one hand tapping out a new symphony on his Generative Music software while the other interacts with his voice-activated email newsgroup ...

David Shea's fragments are pretty inconsequential, but at least they're brief. Gilles Deleuze - who is he? A French philosopher who has influenced young minds - almost as much as the works of Borges or Jung. Well, there's bits of his voice sampled here along with piano records and other vinyl gems picked from Shea's impeccably hip collection.

Verily, the times they are a changing by the nano-second if this music which was once perceived as futuristic and challenging, can now sound so much like the 'spirit of the early 90s' that I get this nostalgia for a time when things seemed slightly easier to comprehend. Maybe I'm finally getting a handle on life, but I doubt it.

Ulf Langheinrich, *Degrees of Amnesia* New York, Asphodel-0981 (1998)

Sombre, grey and excitingly foreboding abstract noises. It's three 'suites' of music which will either pummel or massage your weary cerebellum,



depending on where you plant the laser. 'Pulses' the first suite is certainly the one to play to your job-lot Techno Dance friends just to see them frothing at the mouth when they try and get in the groove with these de-centred beats of the Ulfster. His weird drumbeats and oscillations are fairly useless to your dancing tootsies, as they're detriminedly anti-pleasure and only contribute an extra dimension of coldness. It's a paranoid and restless suite, and a cursory glance at the sub-titles - 'Invasive treatment', 'Severe circumstances', and 'Running nowhere' will invite you to ask yourself which one applies to your life at the moment. You could try and kid your Pink Floyd fanatic pal that all this is simply 'On The Run' updated for the 1990s - minus the dumb collage segments - and watch him run a country mile.

Will this CD induce Amnesia, or merely describe it? Listen on, to find out. How quickly we forget! Forgetfulness is increasingly an symptom of modern life - politics, advertisting and what passes for culture in this benighted country of thugs, couldn't survive without a collective amnesia amongst our massed brains. And alcohol has been proven as a useful tool for destroying vital memory

cells, more efficient than any hostile Trojan or Virus eating away at your C-Drive. We need to forget things in order to survive as people, for example forgetting the hurt done to us by our so-called friends.

Ulf Langheinrich was one half of a mysterious performance art duo called Granular Synthesis, which first manifested itself on the world's peripheral vision in 1991. They were styled as ...ahem...'media terrorists', but probably not as offensively shallow as the pretentious KLF Foundation, else some rumour of their doings would surely have attracted more media attention by now. Ulf is now noodling his way into a metaphysical, existentialist zone of endeavour with this excellent, very concrete, very electro-acoustic CD. Using musical sounds to explore the very nature of a continuous existence...in his words, 'to retain an intense psychological power over time'. This bewildering

pursuit is achieved through a pure sonic density. His method is to make repeating patterns out of loops, often deploying his favoured sources such as breathing, water and machinery. Encapsulating thus three important elements in the cosmos: humans, nature and artifice. Also a painter of minimalist square canvasses, Ulf would apply countless layers of paint thinned with turps to his toiles, in a very monotonous and workmanlike fashion. Although they usually wound up grey, there were many colours within. The same density applies to these musical sounds, yet he achieves a tremendous purity (unlike so many records which merely choke the listener more with each succeeding overdub).

'Absent-Minded Looking Out' is the second suite, which may equally be used as a description of Ulf's painting technique. *Absent Minded* is a near anagram of *Dense Ambient*, which this surely is...we've only half lost our mind, so we're midway to complete amnesia by this point. The title track is the final Degree of Amnesia, and recalls two severe examples of UK structuralist-materialist film-making - *LightMusic* by Liz Rhodes, and the earlier *Clouds* by Peter Gidal. Both relied heavily on memory. These films

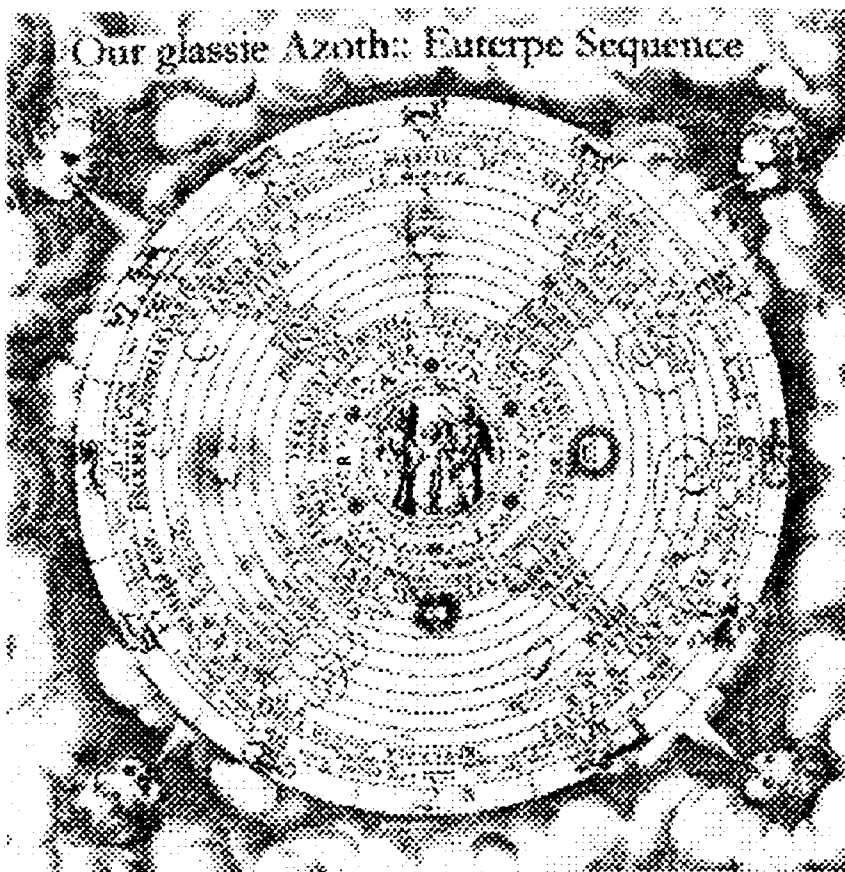
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tested the viewer's endurance limits, but also interrogated your memory of the very precisely ordered, but completely abstract, sequences of visual images. Ulf's eleven-minute excursion into existential hell would likely concur up to a point, filling the world with the same gradual build-up of a dew-like, translucent mist which simultaneously (like some strange nerve gas) wipes clean your memory of what the preceding second was like...it's an eerie experience...

Our Glassie Azoth, *Our Glassie Azoth* Germany, Plate Lunch 03 (1998)

Refreshingly concise and clear minimal music. OGA is a two-person unit based in Wales and they produced some 35 minutes of fine noise in 1996, thence to be released in a highly limited edition of approx. 100 copies on Metal Cassette with a xeroxed cover. To cut through the dense thickets of an abundance of electronic noise releases these days, both musician and listener needs to have some edge - a mental machete. OGA's edge is to have produced a powerful and distinctive music that has sprung from the emotions produced by isolation, and worked within the intellectual framework suggested by a tape compilation on the subject of 'entropy'. Regarding the latter, I suppose we all know the fabric of the universe is winding down at a rate of knots - but what is happening to our brain cells these days? Take heart, because even though we lose millions of neurons in the brain as we grow older, it turns out that maybe they were only getting in our way and slowing down thought anyway. Regarding the former, the sometimes desolate environment of Azoth's Welsh rural homeland has acted as a spiritual backdrop against which a personal Passion Play can be enacted. Azoth is an anchorite adrift in the world, pausing to pray in one of those depressing wooden Presbyterian chapels you find starkly outlined against the Cymru skies.

Generated mainly by feedback and elaborate electro-acoustic treatments of flute and woodblock recordings, this recording's other edge is that it has no electronic instruments or synthesizers; would USA space-rockers, pandering to



their own fetishistic analogue equipment fantasies, please take note! With dashes of clunky reverb, OGA recapture the spirit of Joe Meek, continuing his 1950s outer space fantasy on planet Earth. There is a centre of calmness and grace standing still in the centre of these droning whirlpools. I love it! Will someone please look out for a copy of the original cassette issue for me? I have to see those alchemical symbols printed on red paper before I die ...

Our Glassie Azoth, *Gammahae* Alphane Moon, *Yew Dark on Daze* Oggum records, 7" single (1998)

A split 7" pressed in yellow vinyl - the Alphane Moon side is an echoed acoustic guitar struggling for space with another wall of feedback; almost like a road protester standing alone against a fleet of bulldozers. 'Gammahae' is one of those rare musical occasions that induces nostalgia for a summer holiday I never had. If only a BBC serial had been made of Alan Garner's *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* in the 1970s (perhaps it was?), then OGA should have been signed up to record the incidental music. Privately pressed by the creators and distributed via Cargo, this is one

you'll either need to ask at the counter or send away sharpish to the address below.

PO Box 22, Lampeter,
Ceredigion, SA48 8YD

Our Glassie Azoth, *Euterpe Sequence* Australia, Camera Obscura CAM 011 CD (1998)

Further minimalist excursions into terror and strangeness, this one released by Tony Dale in Victoria; four long abstract tracks, including 'Gammahae' from the single above. The longest and best is the 20-minute 'Insist upon the way', an astonishing meditation of noise that indeed suggests Dr John Dee at work in his reverbatory, amazed and terrified by the unstoppable power he has unleashed. A beautiful package, all sleeve components printed on textured cream art paper decorated with mad alchemical images, and a lengthy quote from Eugenius Philaethe's *Lumen de Lumine*, an impenetrable 17th century text.

Look ahead for extra OUR GLASSIE AZOTH information and interview with Daffyd Roberts ⇒

Tribes of Neurot and Walking Time Bombs, *Static Migration*

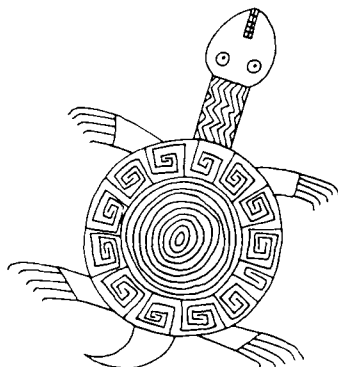
[SA, Release, RR 6972-2 (1998)]

Wild, primitive and ritualistic, as you'd guess perhaps from the 'tribal' title...music for Maurice Sendak's horned and fleecy Wild Things to dance to, under a crescent moon in the blue sky. Hints of early civilisations, unknown religious rites enacted in strange edifices, mysterious animal life and untamed nature. Yet removed from any 'genuine' ethnicity, this is more likely the sound of suburbanite West Coast Americans getting in touch with their Jupiter Psyches by whatever pseudo-scientific means possible, thrashing themselves into a state of retrogressive ecstasy. The link to Les Baxter may not be far from the truth; one analysis of Baxter's great ethnological forgery LPs proposes that they offered the possibility of 'exotic' overseas travel to white suburban people who were too afraid to actually do it...but yielded a kitsch, idealised Hollywood version of it, painted in full Technicolour sound. Much the same way that the *Lost in Space* TV series pictured the terrors of the cosmos as a kind of Arabian Nights fantasy (space is full of scary monster aliens, as every kid knows), rather than the metaphysical trippiness of Kubrick's *2001*. So, *Static Migration* might just be *Ritual of the Savage* for the 1990s electronica audience.

At all events, play this ambitious and large-scaled item day and night throughout the restless itchy Spring months to counteract the pettiness of the day and open up your mind to the cavernous possibilities of wild and unfettered human endeavour, past and present. A new strain of Ambient, decidedly NOT relaxing but filled with a neurotic 'Neurot', dread and tension at every turn, propelled by bass drumming as martial and war-mongering as Saddam Hussein's army of biological death-dealers, and drenched everywhere with ominous synth loops, elephant blast samples, excessive overamped guitar solos that wipe Heavy Metal off the face of the earth, and dense textures of compelling weirdness that smack the brain up as surely as any Shaman's drug. As vital and intense a spiritual experience (in a pagan kinda way) as anyone could desire in this immoral world.

Sleeve art suggests a crop-circle marking in silver on a marble base, nothing whatever to do with X-Files or Dark Skies weirdness. What is static

migration? The 'Inca Roads' celebrated by Erich von Daniken, Frank Zappa and the cover of *Tales from Topographic Oceans* in the 1970s are chiefly about the ritualisation of movement, the transformation of the act of walking into an event linked to both physical survival (the retrieval of water) and religious devotion...your feet are your own prayer mat, something David Thomas would probably approve of. One way our early ancestors developed was through movement; ideas, through graven images and texts, spread through continents simply because people left their homeland and took remnants of their indigenous culture with them. The silver markings here remind us how CDs make this kind of communication nearly instantaneous in contemporary life, yet we all remain 'static'. Thanks to modern communication systems, I get a package thru my door that lets me sit here in my flat in South London, hearing sounds recorded in Texas and San Francisco. Is this a desirable state of affairs? Music like this could reconnect you with your untamed inner self, and persuade anybody that 20th century civilisation is probably a bad idea.



Various Artists, *Wow! and Flutter*

Too Pure / City Slang compilation
WOW!15 [1998]

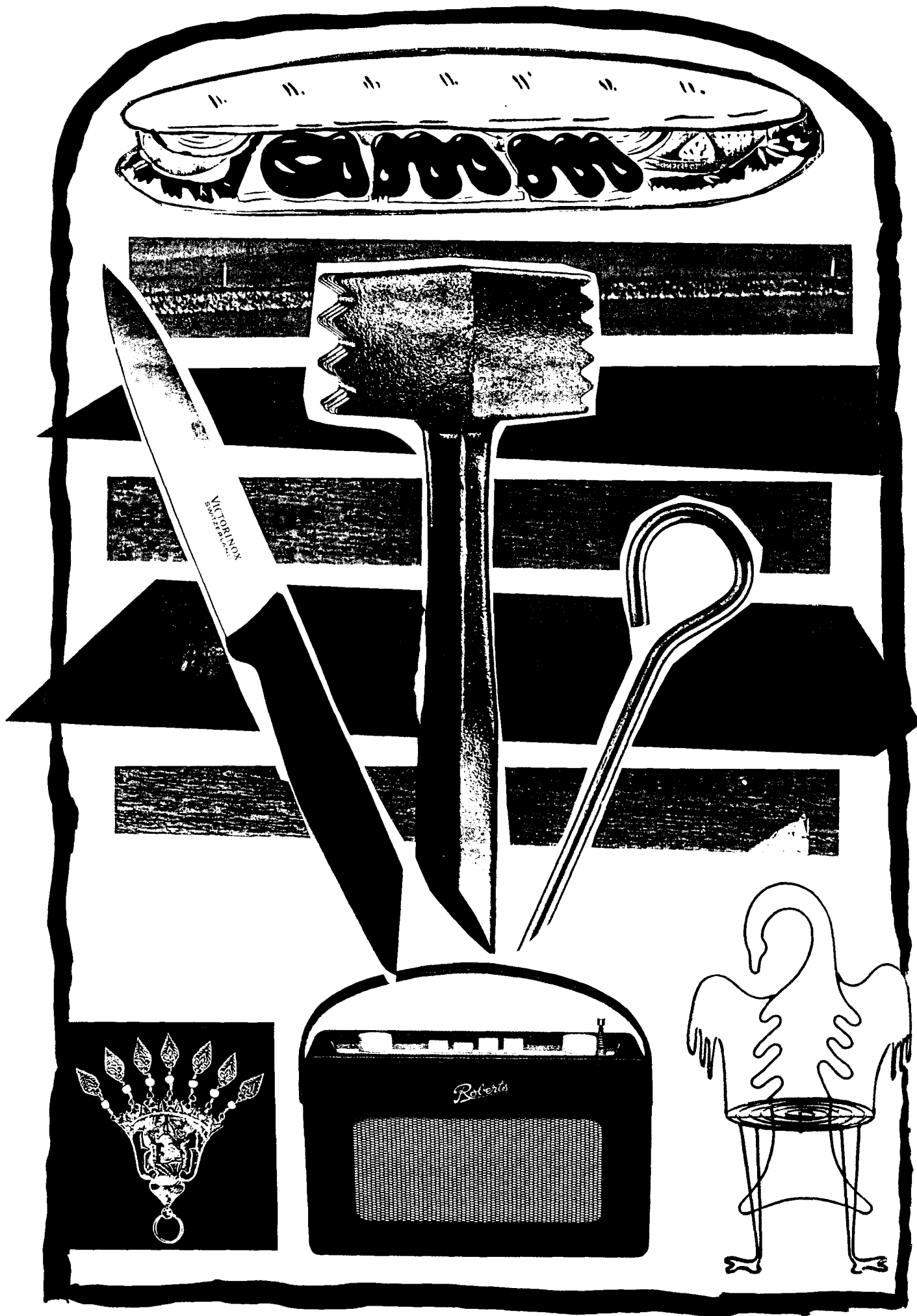
This promo-only release fell into my hands, and not wishing to appear behind the times I decided I too needed to investigate these 'happening' labels and check out the burgeoning 'Experimental Techno' and 'Post-Rock' scenes. There's some bloody excellent stuff here on the first three-quarters of this disc, showing spirit of the age experiments with dance-based methods, analogue synths, pretty melodies and fucked up electronic mayhem. Most of these people are (I would guess) soloists working with computer technology, a method now gaining ground as workable alternative to forming a stupid band with your

so-called friends. The City Slang cuts are mostly instrumental and preferable in my view to those from the Too Pure label - which are mostly songs, and the breathless introverted vocals spoil the nice sounds for me.

Salaryman deserve your simoleons - I think any reasonable lawyer would settle out of court on that point, and one spin of those beefy echoed beats should win the case. R Money was responsible for this mix of 'Voids and Superclusters' which layers in cheesy organ bursts and a found voice sample to deliver a short-circuit to excitement. There's a whole CD of this stuff in the shops, which both you and I need. A 'real' Salaryman is a Japanese executive businessman, living the lifestyle we surely envy with all our hearts: working 18 hours a day in a tiny cubicle behind a glaring computer screen, herded onto the Tokyo underground tube system by uniformed cattle-ranchers, reading sexy comic strip Manga books the thickness of a telephone directory, then being gassed to death by an extremist religious fanatic cult. Where do I sign up?

A brilliant bass-heavy dubby episode by Long Fin Killie, whose dour singer wouldn't be out of place on any 1982 Cherry Red release; a favourite with my die-hard Fall fanatic acquaintance, I believe. And my old friends Techno Animal dazzle the unprepared with a preview of their 1998 album - Kevin Martin and Justin Broadrick being extremely alarming with 'Demonoid', sirens of fire brigades arriving in Hell too late to save a drowning sinner. Some ingenious open-architecture styling from To Rococo Rot, ditto from Schneider, and the irresistible charms of Cologne's Mouse on Mars. Tortoise are represented by one track from their current *TNT* album, and I know how trendy these fellows have been for many moons, endorsed by Jim O'Rourke, yet their phoney antics still fail to convince Mr Sceptical of Doubt City here. Their music is anaemic, ineffectual and amateurish swill. What they do is no better than Bowie's 'Weeping Wall' played by a school choir of third-formers on descant recorders.

Three guitar-based songs (by Jack, Hefner and Calxico) at the end let us down slightly as they're acoustic and mellow and pretty much spoil the strident mood of these many intelligent sequencer-programmers. Still, the openers here should whet your appetite in the direction of investigating further products from either or both labels. Visacard permitting...



What is there in Uselessness To Cause you Distress?

AMM, *Laminal*

Matchless Recordings, MRCD31 3 x CD (1996)

'I think we're finally getting the audience trained' ... said Eddie Prévost half-jokingly one night at the ICA, referring to a recent successful gig where the attentive listeners had presumably sat through an entire AMM gig and managed to refrain from applauding until the actual moment when they realised everything was, indeed, completed. That sense of awe - or at least respect - engendered by being present at one of their gigs, just might be the AMM ideal. I heard one performance at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, where I swear the entire crowd was breathing as one body, listening to nearly five minutes of utter *silence* after the end of a spectacularly successful demonstration of AMM music. The silence was part of the music. Respect, for that moment; an attempt to make space in all our lives for what this music offers. Contrast and compare with the notorious night when they supported Faust at the RFH, virtually pushed aside by an immediate wave of response from the more impatient rock'n'roll audience hungry for immediate gratification.

I'm not here to prescribe some form of etiquette or protocol for improv gigs, proscribing the precise moment when to applaud AMM - what a ghastly concept! I merely direct you to these two events to suggest that AMM music really only matters, only exists, only comes to life, in front of an audience - people listening. All improvisors believe this, I'm sure, but AMM have made some species of high art statement out of this interaction. With a lot of conventional performers, there are aspects of performing - such as the architecture of the venue, the acoustics, the technical failings of the equipment, the weather that night, the composition and disposition of the audience, the price of the tickets ... which are often seen as nuisances, obstacles to overcome, things that get in the way of their pre-programmed performance. 'giving the crowd what they want'. Conversely with AMM, these things become crucial to the performance - not obstacles, but things to be used and contribute to the entire experience. In a way, they manage to weave the concrete realities of mundanity into their art. Above all, it's a people thing - building up a relationship with the people who came to hear - but it's a two-way relationship, we keep answering with waves of silent psychic energy, they keep feeding off it and performing and giving it back to us. This is all arranged by some unspoken, tacit contract; one that you're not aware you're even getting into, until after years of hearing AMM and you suddenly realise you're in debt to them up to your eyeballs. For no matter how little you give - casting your bread on the waters - AMM will repay in dividends, it shall come back an hundredfold ...

Derek Bailey has underscored the point many times in the book reviewed above, but have you ever considered just how passive we can be when we attend an average gig? How can I forget Phil Collins, boasting on the radio of how he virtually 'played the audience ... like making love to a woman...' Maybe so, but a woman who just laid there and took it like an automaton, longing for the passive pleasure of penetration? Rock gigs and classical gigs are both guilty of the same heavy trip - audience manipulation, pompous didacticism. The true joys of participating in a musical event are systematically denied to an audience, whose role is simply to sit back and be 'entertained' by something that's been composed or rehearsed to death long before it's performed. These rules seem more and more enshrined in the very systems and paraphernalia associated with this music, particularly classical music - the paternalistic role of the conductor for example.

AMM music matters because it shows we - as listeners - have a role too. And it's an active role - far beyond any conceptual art cynicism, for example those nasty tricksters who con you inside some drab provincial gallery with their phoney art events, claiming 'if it's inside an art gallery, it must be art'. Listen to me folks. AMM are about compassion and caring. There's a genuine nurturing space inside their music, if you can only listen your way inside of it; but you've got to care too, have faith and believe in what they're doing. Unfortunately it takes a long time before the 'payoff' - maybe years - and even when you get it, you realise it's not a payoff at all. I believe it's a process of empowerment, of dignifying the listener. If you prefer the sensations of immediate gratification to warm up your cold nights, then I guess it's back to Phil Collins (or whoever) for you. And I wouldn't blame you either.

AMM are an improvising group of UK musicians, currently comprising Eddie Prévost (drums and percussion), Keith Rowe (guitar and effects, short-wave radio) and John Tilbury (piano). In various earlier AMM incarnations there have appeared Lou Gare (saxophone), Christopher Hobbs, Lawrence Sheaff and Cornelius Cardew. They've been at it quite a while - over 30 years now, with early concerts and manifestations dating back to the mid 1960s.

Yes, the nineteen-sixties. AMM won a lot of hearts in the 1960s; indeed some consider that records made in that period are the best ones. A degree of loyalty was inspired. In their audiences are a lot of faithful followers, perhaps in pursuit of that original thrill. I certainly heard one (c. 1989) reminiscing about Keith Rowe's crocodile-clip unclipping method: 'He'd have made far more *noise* doing that in the old days, and the noise would have been part of the performance. He's getting too polite.' *The Crypt 12th June 1968* double LP arrived in a Matchless Recordings box with a striking image of radio on the cover. This is one of the most indelible records yet produced ... 'requires to be listened to, loud; four sides of lovely NOISE', enthused Chris Cutler. Nobody I know has a copy, yet you can discern its traces everywhere in the modern world which has effectively never been the same since its release. The entire resources of scientific thinking of the Western World have been spent trying to fathom it out ... it is a mystery that bewilders everyone, even people who haven't heard it yet. It contains, in one marathon session, all that is unreasonable and monstrously inflexible about AMM music. Yet it's not unreasonable at all; 'Be reasonable, demand the impossible' might be the axiom this record exhorts you to live by. The radio image refers to the presence of short-wave transmissions 'collaged' into their performance, a strategy continued to this day by Rowe; but it also shows how much

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they care, they want to *broadcast* this Gospel, this good news, not hide it under a bushel.

They want to make documents - make friends with LPs - the inexhaustible document, something to be listened to forever. I'm edging towards a record review, which is just to suggest you buy the *Lamina*/triple CD sandwich as soon as is humanly possible. Unless you're a beginner, in which case reach for the first AMM LP, in its super-enhanced CD mode - it lets you programme bursts of *silence* whenever you want. Remember at the opening I warned you about silence ... better get used to it brothers and sisters, there's a lot of it in the graveyard.

Lamina is structured like the submarine sandwich graphic on its cover, programmed to represent 'thirty years in the making of AMM Music', which was quite accurate at time of release (1996). Some outstanding unreleased material from 1969, recorded 16 December in Denmark and dubbed 'The Aarhus Sequences' after the fact - this first disc exhibits the collective talents of Cornelius Cardew, Christopher Hobbs, Lou Gare, Keith Rowe and Eddie Prévost. There is such a palpable unique feeling to these recordings you can almost taste it; it's tension, certainly, but growing from the excitement of

people who are going somewhere nowhere has ever been before. Like explorers in the Arctic wastes, AMM are roped together and urging each other on to the next station, half-surprised they've made it this far.

The CD format is just made for AMM music - who better to occupy 70 minutes of continuous time-space. And what better format to document the quiet moments. On some days, I'd suggest you clear the space, open your mind, sip a glass, smoke one, tidy your room, light the candles and make space for a blissed-out epiphany. On the other hand, why be so fucking precious? - you should USE this music - just slam it on whenever you feel like it and see how those

atmospheres hover over your day. It'll make those looming thunderclouds overhead seem pretty tame, that's for sure.

The very antithesis of a 'good visual' band, AMM concerts (which used to be performed in near-total darkness, in the good old days) are more like encounter sessions ... watching a bunch of very polite men respecting each other, not getting in each other's way. The before and after of a performance is

also like an encounter session, where Prévost encourages heartfelt and open discussions. (Apparently this is one thing Cornelius Cardew never took part in; we need hardly be surprised that he took again AMM in a big way later on in life, but he went on a strange path anyway.)

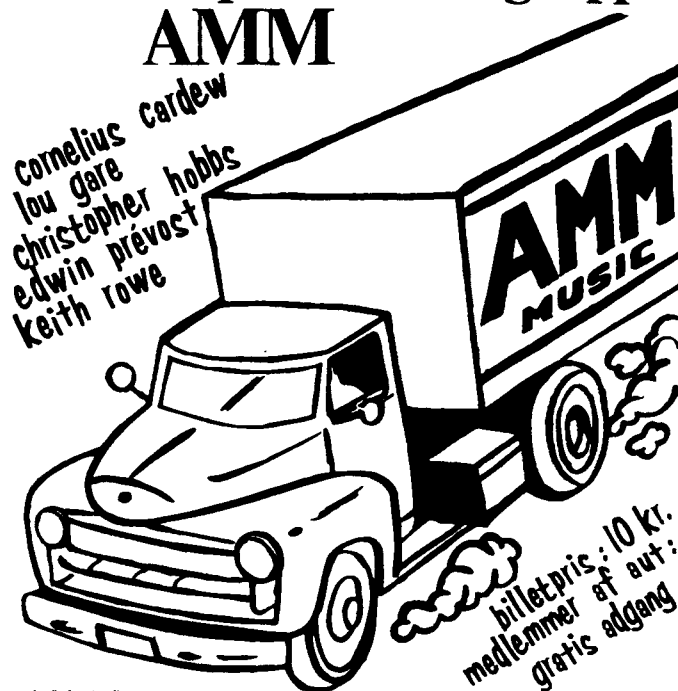
Thankfully this is not the you-will-be-democratic, like it or not, attitude of Henry Cow; it's not enforced co-operation. They must be doing something right.

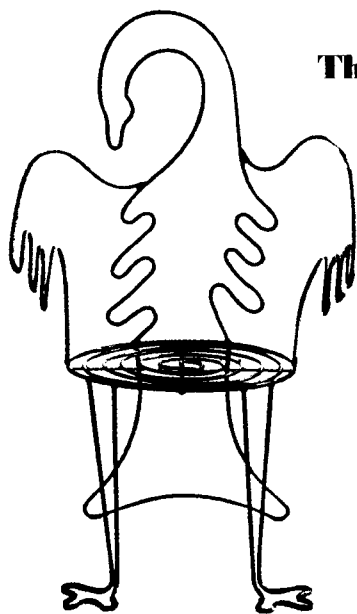
But the visuals remain in Keith Rowe's striking, Pop-Artish album covers, his distinctive outline brush style resembling the work of Patrick Hughes, only looser. And for those who want further images, I leave you with the wisdom of Californian 'Conrad' who (in *Forced Exposure* 18) conjured up some

amusing, but incredibly accurate images for *The Crypt* 12th June 1968, testifying to the frequency and detail of his listening:

Halfway through side three is where the fog horn becomes the menacing cow...side four begins with a hellish ping pong game in the aviary. There's a great interlude of plate rattling in the short circuiting kitchen. Music like this makes me want to get one of those rolling sound system mini-trucks so I can blast this into the lives of anyone within fifty yards of the road.

aarhus unge tonekunstnere tirsdag d. 16. december 69 kl. 20 det jyske musik - konservatorium den eng- elske improvisationsgruppe AMM





Eddie Prévost

Edwin Prévost is a wiry little fellow with a genial bearded visage, and superficially hard to connect with the awesomely loud and powerful sounds he generates from his drum kit. I reckon him the 'architect' of a given AMM performance, building both the foundations and the scaffolding (which is often left completely open by the other workmen, they like it unfinished). Builder of an impressive home-made bass drum from a large barrel that requires only the gentlest coaxing from a soft mallet to issue ominous rumbles. The only drummer I have seen who takes a violin bow to his cymbals, setting up an uncanny screech halfway between percussion and drone. The most articulate apologist for the group, Prévost provides extensive sleeve notes for many releases which express the aspirations and paradoxes of AMM music far better than I, and teaches you something about philosophy besides. Writer of a extended essay published as *No Sound Is Innocent*, a copy of which has yet to grace my shelf. Works extensively outside of AMM and is known as a formidable sparring partner in any improvising situation. On the heavily weird side, has played with David Jackman of Organum to produce the staggeringly strange *Flayed* in 1987. Has also played in a slightly more conventional jazz-ish improvising combo called Eddie Prévost Band, with Geoff Hawkins, Gerry Gold and Marcio Mattos. Set up the Matchless Recordings Label to release recordings by AMM and other related products.

Keith Rowe

A guitarist who should be near the top of anyone's 'alternative top 100 guitarists', a feature yet to be published in *MOJO* magazine, Rowe's instrument seems to have evolved through years of deconstructing and tinkering into a ugly

open-faced contraption of wire and steel which barely resembles a guitar, or anything else. You have to play it table-top. The fundamental weirdness of the device is taken further with the use of crocodile clips on the strings and steel rods inserted at various points on the 'neck'. Amplified, this monster can perform at head-shattering decibel levels or as quietly as a woodlouse walking over a bed of feathers. Rowe achieves the latter effect by directing a hand-held electric fan at the instrument, not even touching the strings. *AMM III* is a personal favourite record of mine and displays Rowe to advantage - it's a duo recording with Prévost. Also hear his solo CD *A Dimension of Perfectly Ordinary Reality* for a self-contained statement of his guitar's capability; he even plays a Cardew composition. The only AMMster who continues to use short-wave radio ever since the early 1960s experiments; nowadays it's more



commonplace to sample foreign sounds on records of course, but serendipity is what gives Rowe the edge; always open to the fortuitous delights of chance procedure in art, he will broadcast whatever fragments the airwaves see fit to yield up at that specific live performance, and incorporate them into a piece. Rowe has not neglected his Jazz roots - I have a 3 x LP boxed set *Wipe Out*, of him playing with Amalgam, live dates recorded in 1979. Trevor Watts on the sax and drummer Liam Genockey. A classic free blowing monster session.

John Tilbury

A quiet and unobtrusive piano player, Tilbury always seems to me to provide the benign and compassionate 'new man' component to AMM performances. His grand piano can rumble and roar along with the best of any given noise-maker, but usually

quietly tinkles when he feels there is appropriate space. Has performed and recorded the works of prominent 20th-century composers, for example John Cage and Morton Feldman, the latter of which is singularly apt, I feel (it's so quiet).

Cornelius Cardew

A member of AMM 1966-1971, joining Prévost, Rowe and Gare shortly after they had already begun to make AMM Music. Cardew was from a modern classical background - a disciple of the teachings of John Cage and a student of Karlheinz Stockhausen. The other players had emerged from the furthest reaches of the 1960s UK jazz scene, which is why it's interesting to compare the path taken by some of their contemporaries - for example the groups Joseph Holbrooke or the Spontaneous Music Ensemble. Because Cardew was relatively well-known, some inept critics seemed to think AMM was all his idea, the other players mere satellites in orbit around his genius. One singularly ill-informed scribe dubbed AMM 'The Cornelius Cardew Quintet' in print. Understandably, the other musicians were somewhat annoyed, because it eclipsed their contribution and detracted from the democratic and holistic properties of AMM Music by imposing some star-system personality framework. Cardew's Scratch Orchestra has resulted in at least one great recording which I care for very much and have always considered using it as a template for teaching people how to improvise from scratch. Issued as an LP in 1971 on Deutsche Gramophone 2561 107 with a couple of chapters from *The Great Learning* which will be performed at the May LMC Festival of Experimental Music this year, for which the workshop notes sound very interesting. Cardew



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proved he could enact a species of genuine democracy in his music, but later he took a very strange turn towards extreme Maoist politics. Filled with the evangelistic fervour that only a patronising white middle-class privileged male can muster, he decided he must write songs for the Working Man. These have apparently been recorded and issued; I have never heard them but by all accounts they are something to be avoided by any rational person. The record has been described to me as the aural equivalent of a visit from some particularly obstinate Jehovah's Witnesses. While in this frame of mind, Cardew also convinced himself that Stockhausen, his former mentor, was somehow ideologically unsound and wrote a book about it (*Stockhausen Serves Imperialism*) which sounds like it ought to be an absolute hoot, if I could only find a copy. Yet he has his followers, some of whom are convinced of some darker conspiracy behind the 'accidental' death of Cardew (a hit and run driver killed him) in the early 1980s.

Some Records

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

AMM at the Roundhouse, London, INCUS EP 1
A splendid duo recording from 1972 of Prévoist and Gare as part of the 'ICES' festival. Notes say 'The music is a continuous segment of the longer performance that took place, the slower part following on after an AMM silence'. The sleeve gives a clue as to the meaning of the letters AMM, which a New York audience member interpreted as 'Audacis Musicae Magistri'. The cipher must remain as secret as an Alchemist's formula; it's one of the things that reminds the players of 'the early ideas of the group'. Interestingly, this artefact was the only 7" issued by the Incus label and has become a major rarity.

The Crypt 12th June 1968, Matchless MR 5
I once played this to a certain fellow who, after ten minutes, could bear no more and cried 'Four sides! Have you ever sat down and listened to it in one sitting?' looking at me with the expression one reserves for those completely mad. This fellow has since had a complete turnabout on his anti-improv stance, and is now totally committed to playing guitar in the 'free' mode ... blame me, or this record ... but find a copy if you can. Also reissued as a CD which delivers, I understand, the complete performance. Recorded in London by Bob Woolford. You need this record.

AMM BBC 1968 and London 20/4/67, C60 cassette
Bootleg tape from the radio of that 'vintage' era. The 1968 side comes from *Music in Our Time*, a Radio 3 broadcast, and has a spoken introduction by Cardew. The flip is a live performance from the Commonwealth Institute, also broadcast by the BBC. One of my favourite boots; the *Basement Tapes* of avant-garde music.

AMM Music, Elektra EUK 256 (1966)

Rereleased with other material as ReR AMMCD (1990). With the classic 'yellow truck' cover by Rowe. The original issue on the Elektra label now fetches a tidy sum, due to rarity and the fact that DJs apparently enjoy sampling it. More affordable is the ReR CD reissue which contains bonus bits and the option of programming 'silence' wherever you like. The aesthetic of silence triumphs yet again; a link was spotted by Peter Gidal that connects the Andy Warhol screenprint of the electric chair to the work of composer John Cage.

Generative Themes, Matchless MR6 (1983)
Four long studio tracks cut at the end of 1982.

Combine and Laminates, New York Pogus productions P 201-4 (1990)
A 1984 live recording from Chicago.

AMM III: It had been an ordinary enough day in Pueblo, Colorado, JAPO / ECM Records 60031 (1980)

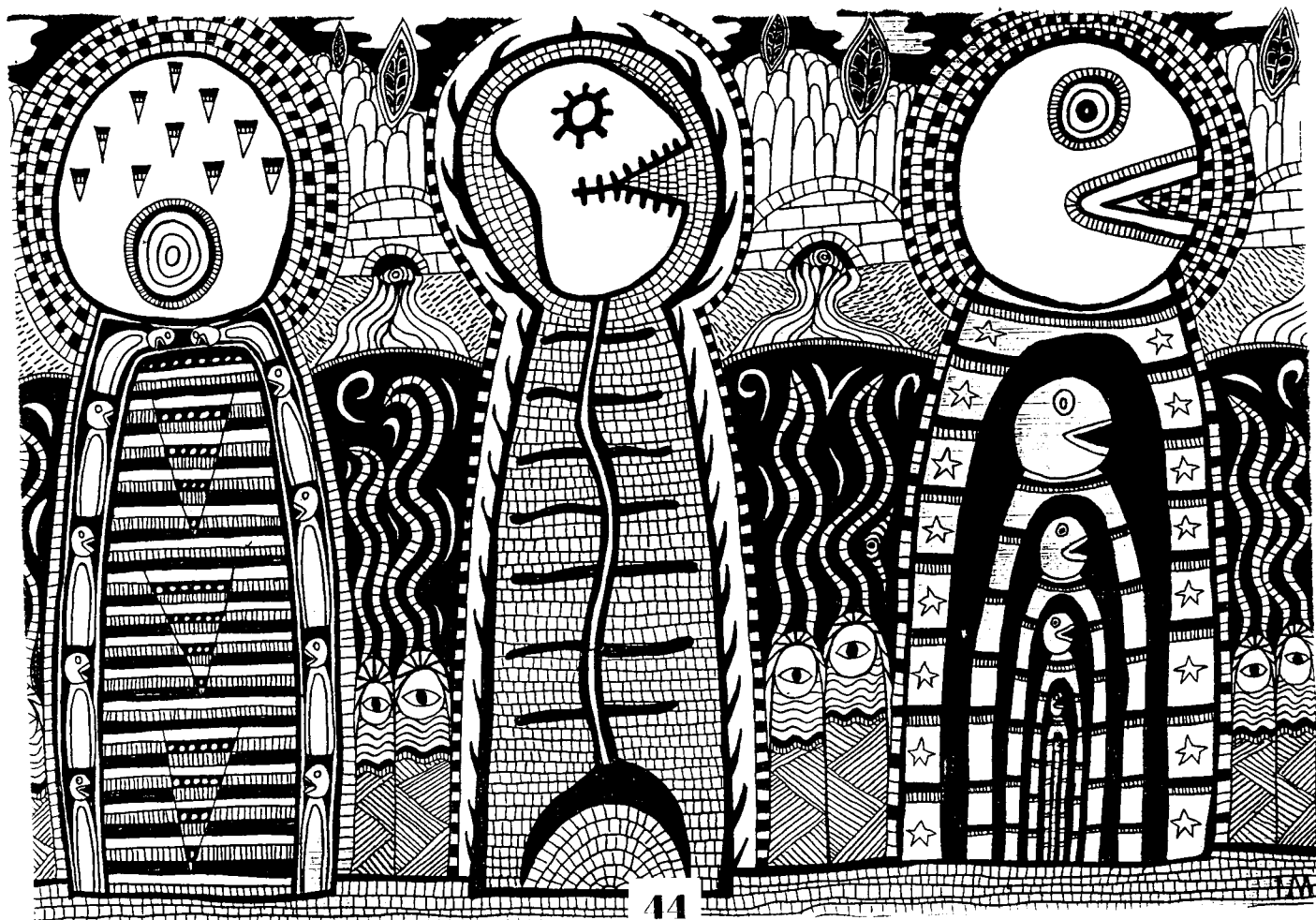
Five studio recordings made in Germany in 1979, a Rowe - Prévoist duo. The exceptionally brilliant opening 'Radio Activity' yields up the found title. This was the first AMM record I ever heard. I thought it was some insane heavy metal guitarist recorded at the wrong speed. It induced queasiness and nausea.

The Inexhaustible Document, Matchless MR13
Two long sides recorded at the Union Chapel in London in 1987. Features the divine cello playing of Rohan de Saram who has not appeared on any other AMM records, to my knowledge.

From a Strange Place, JAPAN PSFD-80 (1996)
68 minutes from The Egg Farm. A singularly quiet set from a label renowned for some of the noisiest recordings in the world.

An Afflicted Man's Musical Box, United Dairies UD012 (1982)

A rather collectable vinyl comp of Industrial-mode music featuring Nurse With Wound, Jacques Berrocal, Anima, Operating Theatre and Foetus. AMM contribute a fine segment.



The Discurator's Den

Peter Jeffries / Jono Lonie,
At Swim 2 Birds
New Zealand / San Francisco.
Drunken Fish Records, DFR 31
CD (1997)

I'm nearly as ill-equipped to comment on New Zealand independents as Anthea Turner, but the thought has struck me - were remaindered copies of Brian Eno's first three LPs loaded as ballast on all ships entering Dunedin Bay in the early 1980s? I know this doesn't apply to The Dead C but you can hear those building-block melodies all over Chris Knox's songs and I caught myself humming 'Mother Whale Eyeless' to the chords of this album's 'Piano 2'. There's also enough Fripp-ish insect swarm guitaring here to satisfy any oblique strategist.

Well, there are worse role models than old dome-head and *At Swim 2 Birds* was first issued in a minuscule edition by Flying Nun (in 1987) so I'd guess it wasn't intended as a major statement of originality. If you take *At Swim* as an airy, instrumental 'holiday' diversion you'd be on the right trail. Using the Otago Peninsula as their 'Green World' the two musicians must've switched on their TEAC 4-track whenever some mellifluous idea took their fancy. No great shakes perhaps, but the novelty of real instruments and its sheer home-made clunkiness are a relief from some of the slick and self-important Ambient projects ten years down the line.

JOHN BAGNALL

Ashtray Navigations, *Four Raga Moods*
Betley Welcomes Careful Drivers,
No number CD

CD from a prolific cassette outfit with a nifty line in useful relaxo drone noiseworks. This one is strikingly quiet. There's guitars here somewhere, along with a harmonium or electronic facsimile thereof, plus found tapes, loops and some unobtrusive but

effective treatments. The performer or performers are so self-effacing that they barely appear to be playing anything, yet throughout there is utmost control over a series of powerful noisy sources.

Producer Phil Todd writes:

'I like to mess around with the recording quality to try and erase the origins of the recording, so that the listener won't be able to readily identify the sound sources. The guitar drone

sound is a mixture of toy harmonium and bass guitar with various metal objects shoved between the strings, played with a magnetic bow.' That the music never slides into uncontrolled torrents of feedback, nor degenerates into a blancmange-like sludge of free playing, is testament alone to the discipline here. Track three rewards the patient eardrum-owner with that most sweet and relaxing of natural sounds, the rain falling outside your window. Here it becomes part of the overall ambience, nature itself invited to 'jam' along with the musicians. Any demanding listener who requires more eventful music or even a pay-off for sitting still for so long will be disappointed, I'd better warn you; myself, I could stay for days wandering

inside this compelling back-garden assemblage. Like the dreamy ending of the Tarkovsky movie *Solaris*, the raga moods of Ashtray Navigations promise to bring a gentle shower of rain inside your house.

*Phil Todd, 7 Woodside,
Madeley, Crewe, Cheshire,
CW3 9HA*



Donald Miller and Michael J Schumacher, *Flood*
Newport, Warpodisc 04 (1998)

An 'instant classic' of improvised electro-acoustic music this, showing perfect control of the power of the instrument in question and letting it resonate within an organised framework - not just another mindless chaos feedback noise LP. Donald Miller, that frightening electric guitar manipulator, has long stalked this earth as one-third of the mighty and magnificent Borbetomagus, and as such it has been his doom to cross swords for all eternity with those two detirmined puffers Sauter and Dietrich who hoot their honking saxes like foghorns on the river Styx. As the first LP by the 'Borbs' was issued in 1980,

this means Miller has for nearly twenty years been rethinking the nature and role of the electric guitar, in exciting ways that defy any sense of proportion and decency - combining it with the wrong instruments, and taking the

"one of the records of 1980"

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instrument apart (physically or intellectually) to discover its true, inner voice - something far more powerful than a million Jimi Hendrix imitators could even imagine. 'Michael manages to bow his [guitar] from nearly a foot away', says Miller describing *Flood*. 'I am known for disembowelling mine.' That some listeners find this sound horrendous or distasteful is understandable, but we must take steps to cure them.

Michael Schumacher is a composer, who has run the gamut from avant-garde string ensemble music and at least one composed symphony, to work with tapes, prepared guitars and synthesizers, and electronic sound installations for art galleries. His speciality has been to feed blocks of acoustic materials into a computer programme that then proceeds to relentlessly spit 'em out in an unrepeatable, manic sequence. This CD adequately demonstrates the 'defiant examination of the noise particles inherent in a magnetic field' that Milo Fine has identified as Miller's unique contribution to modern life.

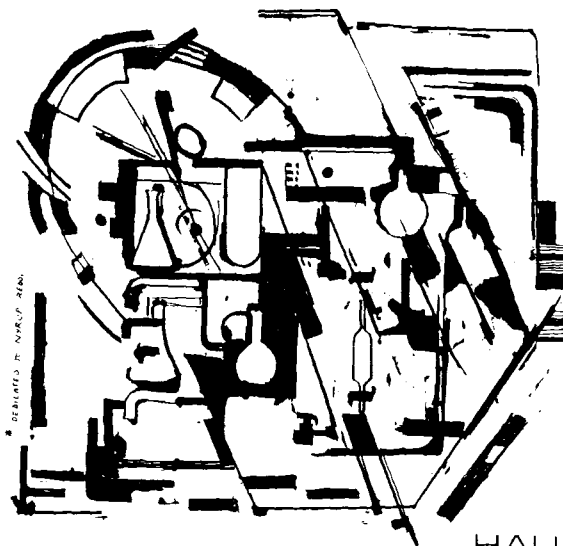
These noisy drones are killer cuts. While first track 'Fludd' might be taken as a soothing contemplation of the rising waters so familiar to dwellers in the UK midlands in April 1998, it more likely refers to Robert Fludd, the 17th century pantheist - a member of the London College of Physicians and follower of the Swiss alchemist Paracelsus. His quote about the relation of the Earth to the Sphere of Water is strikingly apt in this context, and it also appears in the booklet for Harry Smith's Smithsonian Folkways box, *The Anthology of American Folk Music*. I mention this as Miller is probably as clued in on Alchemy and Magick as Harry Smith was, and like him can boast that there is no subject he hasn't studied - and see below.

'The Broken Wind' presents a harsh attack of the elements, its mangled textures and distortion corresponding to an inner torment ... the player's psyche was a puppet on wires of steel. 'Lamentation on the Death of Thrash Metal' (a live cut from 1996 - remainder are studio recordings) conjures up awesome and cavernous atmospheres to add to the suitable dirge-like feel, even if the title is some ironic arty joke ... so much space and

duration to explore here, it's a scary bit of musical pot-holing for the listener.

The 'Coronath on the Suicide of Thomas Billisbie' may refer to a real or imaginary loss of a friend, and the heart-shredding music certainly sublimates some inner grief if so intended. But it's no wallowing in self-pity, rather a stern examination of the tragic circumstances of wasted life and needless death. Contrast and compare with (elsewhere this issue) *A Death Never to Be Complete*, the recent CD by Fushitsusha. Miller's sound here approximates a surrealist image, a violin dancing inside a fireplace grate.

Schumacher met Miller at a concert, partly through a mutual interest in La



Monte Young who thus 'holds all blame'. In their subsequent social encounters, the composer found he was somewhat in awe of Miller, who is something of a polymath and well-read on many esoteric areas of study, such that his talk is full of avant-garde art and radical philosophy. So there's the story - a legendary one - a wildman wizard of arcane knowledge, adrift in a world of pre-enlightened ignorance, meets up with a humble organiser of sound, who offers to contain his magic within a special envelope, to be passed on to any unsuspecting wandering peasant who's prepared to let the genie out of the bottle. This 'Flood' visited upon the earth is the result, an emotional and intellectual torrent of raw, unrestrained creativity.

Has durability
been sacrificed

L Voag, *The Way Out* Alcohol. ALLVCD (1997)

An eccentric rescued item, this from 1979, one of the many fruits of bizarre and extreme individualism that flourished in the post Punk / New Wave years of glory. Music lovers in the UK had their ears and minds opened by all that welter of artistic activity circa 1976-1979, leading to a significant reappraisal of (for one thing) Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band - from which artistic centre many things flow. Voag's insane record is probably one of them, although it's also possible to situate it among the company of other home-grown singer-songwriters who beguile us with their charmingly idiosyncratic voice mannerisms - such

as Peter Hammill, Tynon Dogg, and Edward Barton. Largely a DIY affair - Voag's self-reliance reminded me of another neglected do-it-all hero, Alvaro Pena Rojas (The Chilean with the Singing Nose), who was exiled from his native Chile in the 1970s and produced a string of highly eccentric masterpieces from his South London HQ in the early 1980s. But there the resemblance ends, as Alvaro was an acoustic piano and bass man. Conversely Voag was more of an electronic experimentalist, keen to disrupt the structures of his songs (which seem to be pretty open-ended to begin with) with terrifying irruptions of chaotic noise. When not deploying

HALL

such explosive tactics, sudden silent passages perform the same heart-stopping effect - taking the concept of dub mixing dynamics to a pretty wild extreme. The lyrical content is filled with impenetrable symbols, demented word play and surrealist juxtapositions that even make Syd Barrett seem a little tame and fluffy. Then there's the pictures: some unsettling collages and line drawings leaping from the CD booklet in vivid, solid black and white shapes that cut into your retinas. Here are strange half-alive androids, their wiry entrails hanging out, adrift in hostile territories or blank abstract zones. I want to live with this record for a few years before I attempt to interpret these strange images and texts, but an initial feeling comes over from first spin of not a little empathy with Voag's alienation and isolation. Retreating from the harsh world, he invents a private musical language enriched with an equally

cryptic lyrical text; which makes listening to this as close as we might come to entering the world of Outsider artist Adolf Wolffli perhaps (because he too wrote 'music' along with his crazy texts - I think some Industrial musos even issued a record of their attempts to play these staves of lunacy). You'll guess from the above that this CD probably won't be to everyone's tastes, but Recommended always carried it in their catalogue. Today, there are too many straight men in the world, not enough wackos - so Ed Baxter's reissue of Voag's warped vision is timely, desirable, welcome.

*Alcohol Records, PO Box 556,
London SE5 0RL*

Sun Ra and His Arkestra, *Cosmo Sun Connection* ReR, SR1 (199)

Infinitely superb, as always. This particular Sun Ra item featured in the ReR catalogue since 1985 (when the label was still Recommended Records). The master tapes were donated to Chris Cutler and he pressed a small vinyl edition in 1985, of which this is a reissue. It's a private Saturn recording of live Arkestra performances from 1984, featuring Tyrone Hill, Marshall Allen, John Gilmore, Elmo Omo, Danny Ray Thompson and others. This record is full of the mystery and strangeness that only Ra's players can deliver. 'Cosmonaut Astronaut Rendezvous' is the prime example of the cosmic chaotic consciousness this music will bestow upon you, a free-blowing piece propelled by the wildest drumming, which inexplicably grows into a fantastic alto solo by Marshall Allen, leaving the listener hanging with a question-mark of bewildered delight hanging over his head. Brilliant mini-moog solos by The Ra himself feature on the title track and 'As Space Ships Approach'. You can contrast his electronic keyboard style with the slightly more conventional blues-stride playing on 'Cosmo Journey Blues'. The mini-moog playing is wild, free, full of scary spaces, nasty growling noises and sweet melodic phrases nestling paradoxically in the same moment. At transcendental times like these, Sun Ra managed to transmit a palpable alien-ness that nobody has ever come close to, try as they may to perform self-consciously 'weirdly'. The CD also includes a fine rendition of that concert favourite 'Fate in A Pleasant Mood' - so for sheer variety showcasing the many facets

of the Arkestra, you can't go far wrong with this. Buy it for a friend who's never heard Sun Ra and let them 'open the door to the cosmos!'

Jessamine, *Another Fictionalised History* USA, Histrionic CD (No number) (1997)

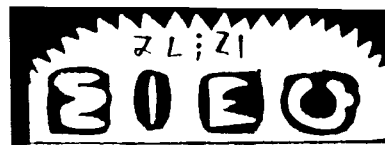
Elaborate folds, textured vellum, metallic inks. Jessamine certainly take pains over their seductive packaging, more than hinting the wisest format choice is big bad heavy-gram vinyl. Yet even this CD version of long gone limited singles and other 'rare' sweepings up (1992-97) luxuriates in a triple digipak gatefold with artpaper booklet! It's enough to make a master printer weep buckets of pleasure over his paper swatches.

Jessamine's fetish for the materials doesn't stop there - they even credit their equipment. Space Cadets will know the score by now and salivate on cue when they clock the listing of Moogs, envelope filters, Octavia pedals and ARP Odysseys. But what can this Oregon quartet do with such a rusty panoply of resurrected hardware?

Sadly, a handful of pedestrian jams laid down under the spell of elephant tranquilisers. There are two mirror-image covers of Suicide and Silver Apples songs and yet more lumpen astral doodling. At least 'Your Head is So Small' has the grace to feature a mumbled lyric describing a walk along the seabed. Explaining I'd guess some nauseous submerged bass-stroking as the rest of the band wade ashore the Land of Nod.

Too much in nostalgic thrall to vintage machinery and the surface territory of past electronic heroes. Jessamine are like specimens bred and raised in captivity. Unlock their cage, offer them real freedom and adventure and here's betting they wouldn't even budge an inch.

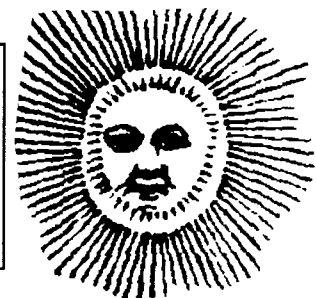
JOHN BAGNALL



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Longstone, *Surrounded by Glass* Ochre Records, OCH 005LCD (1998)

Longstone, a duo of musicians both called Mike - Michael Cross and Michael Ward - follow up their *Convex Structure* 10-inch LP (released 1997) with this ten-track CD of exciting electronica and drum machine adventures, whose deceptively simple trajectory is occasionally layered with radio/TV samples, strange drones and minimal guitar solos. Often very Cluster-Kraftwerk influenced, but these days who isn't? The pair have been loosely associated with Bunnyman Will Sergeant, who's perhaps considering hanging up his rock'n'roll leathers by virtue of dipping a toe in the experimental waters - he recently caused the theremin and synthesizer to warble their metal larynxes live at the Garage, for a special Ochre Record night there. Longstone also joined forces with Ankst Records in North Wales to take part in a monumental jam session - a freeform happening since dubbed 'Serpent' - with such luminaries as Stylus, Ectogram, and Anglesey Ambient Experiment. While this CD may not be crucial listening throughout, when they're at their best Longstone can create fascinating, deeply abstract tracks like 'Internal Vibrations', which rotates its planes and dimensions so unexpectedly that even the most doped-out listener will be stirred from his cushions by these bewildering progressions. There are some almost danceable (in a Mogadon kinda way) tracks here too, if you can find them. In amongst the wonky bleep cocktail olives and analogue sandwiches, Longstone somehow manage to leave enough space to let the mind go a-wandering, yet allow the music to progress in a very geometric fashion. *Surrounded by Glass* will of course suggest an H P Lovecraft story to the erudite listener, the 1935 'science fiction' story *In the Walls of Eryx*. Longstone have created a fitting soundtrack for that tale of a forlorn spaceman wandering around an impenetrable glass maze, 'Lost in a building without doors - a building which I cannot see!'



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Various Artists, *Four Years in 30 Seconds* Dirtier Promotions 10" LP, 10DPROM45 (1997)

A beautiful (as always) Babs Santini cover, and a nice idea. Twenty-five artists from all corners of the globe supply titchy wee bits of music, none lasting much longer than thirty seconds. The sleevenotes and unorthodox conception scream collector's novelty item, and certainly the presence of Nurse With Wound, Merzbow and Faust will guarantee good homes for many a copy. But, one might ask, is novelty in itself sufficient reason for purchase? This may depend on how much this is being flogged for, and how rich you feel. Most contributors have supplied short slabs of noise which are probably only brief by virtue of their inclusion within this concept, which is a bit of a shame. The pieces by Faust and The Pickle Factory (don't ask me) both suggest uncomfortable and untimely truncation. Of course, it isn't all a cacophonous hullabaloo. There's a few nuggets of fine cranky noise, of the kind that fans of William Hartnell-era Doctor Who may find especially enjoyable. Inversion's 'I: I Safety' in particular would provide a splendid coda to Hartnell's classic comedy turn to camera in episode two of The Aztecs (written by John Lucarotti, 1964). But ... sadly a lot of this is pretty arbitrary. Merzbow, Illusion of Safety and Lee Ranaldo all do their usual things. Stefan Jaworzyn does his usual thing, but Candianly. Ho-hum.

Never mind. Headbutt produce a Radio 4 related audio pun worthy of the mighty Laurie Taylor himself, and a few others (Konstruktivists, Contrastate, Paul Gomersall, Ideal Fire Company) show that some thought has gone into their tracks: that their pieces are thirty seconds long for some other reason than getting yer name on a record. By far the weirdest contribution must come from Nurse With Wound who, amidst this cavalcade of noise, feedback, squeaks, burps and Contrastate's

JARA
002



of shy-boy Jeff himself experiencing some epiphany in a copse of silver birches. Octal is just one of a current glut of space practitioners who worship the reverb. Making a choice among this (often weak) gene pool can lead to disappointment. I'd give Octal a cautious thumbs-up, just don't expect to dance the Mashed Potato to any of this stuff.

JOHN BAGNALL

Muslingauze, *Nile Quartra and Exitintoday c/w Thuggee* Jara Discs 7" single, JARA002 (1994)

Muslingauze have on a number of occasions listed their principal influences as Arafat, Gadaffi and the P.L.O. Oo-er! This may perhaps explain why appreciation of their music is not so widespread as it surely deserves to be. It seems appropriate that they appear on the same label as Konstruktivists. Both groups deliver similarly mysterious atmospheric works - NKVD's 'Yeltsin 97' is not a million miles from Muslingauze territory. Most reviewers of the chap's work resort to the same set of phrases so (not wishing to fly in the face of tradition) here they are again...rhythmic electronics...strong Eastern influence ... intense ... brooding ... and so forth. Personally, I find this record intriguing and compelling - it's like Ambient music which demands attention, without any of the wishy-washy New Age connotations of that genre. If you think the sun goes in when Bryn Jones pulls his trousers up, then this record may add weight to your (rather unusual) belief. If you're merely urious to investigate Muslingauze, this is a good starting place. You may find the politics suspect - for better or worse, they are understated and ambiguous - but if this is the result, then better to follow the P.L.O. than E.L.O.!

WAR ARROW

Jara Discs, PO Box 101,
Wymondham, Norfolk NR18 0JU

magnificently odd 'Poodles in Practice at the Battersea Dog's Opera', have opted to play...*baggy funk!* Truly nutty...

WAR ARROW

(Editor's note - the 10-inch *Four Years* has sold out apparently, but if you rush you can get it on a CD version which is twice as long, because it repeats all the tracks played backwards. War Arrow thought this was a pretty naff idea, but I think it works splendidly myself.)

Octal, *Octal* Space Age Recordings, ORBIT 007 CD

Seventy minutes of what you'd expect from Magnog's guitarist. Minus the skeleton support of band structure, Jeff Reilly layers dollops of guitar (and Moog) effects which steadfastly avoid momentum or getting to the point. Resolution obviously isn't Octal's aim - this is an open-ended and introverted record. The sound is merely 'there', like dripping condensation on a kitchen window. Everything is refracted and nebulous, even the unintelligible poetry and vocal moans which are knitted into the fuzzy textures like some private code. There's a palpable folkly/nature element too, borne out by the sleeve's solarised photos of bare trees and one

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Solex, *Solex vs The Hitmeister* Matador, OLE 287-2 (1998)

Poppy Fun and mucho enjoyable, but about as insubstantial as a meringue. A sampler's delight, and demonstrating how limited the general musical vocabulary is in danger of becoming in a world where Portishead and Beck are our new masters. Elisabeth Esselink is Solex; she runs a second-hand record shop in Amsterdam and decided one day to run amok through the library of sounds surrounding her petite and lovely frame. Rather than hand-pick rare vinyl, she went bargain-basement; searching in the pile of unsold and unsellable CDs for usable break beats and interesting noises. The twelve tracks resulting here were put together using a single keyboard and a clapped-out sampling device from the 1970s. Live instruments - drums, guitar, piano, melodica and clarinet - are dropped in by guest musician Geert de Groot, to forefront Solex's weedy vocals. She sings fragmented glimpses of mini-stories in the imaginary life of Solex, which on paper are barely coherent - but are just saved by her performances, which somehow draw you into her cartoon-like visions. It's a twilight ghost-world of dimly-lit interiors, a stage set for vaguely unsatisfying relationships between people who somehow can't really see each other. There are a lot of what I (sexist pig that I am) would identify as rather trivial gurdy details in the lyrics, like 'I got a snag in my tights', 'Don't wear your perfume today' and 'There's a bag of sweets floating around somewhere'; and some childish stabs at word-play, eg 'As soon as I got a paycheck you asked me to make it high-tech and to bleach my flecks'. As writing puns goes, this somehow fails to reach James Joycean heights, but no matter. By no means an objectionable listen, and despite being so ultimately unsatisfying it's remarkable how she can milk so much mileage from a single idea.

Fred Frith, *The Previous Evening* ReR FF1 (1998)

Frith's compositional tour de force is also a tribute to three giant American modern composers: John Cage, Morton Feldman and Earle Brown. Each piece works as a splendid homage which

international
potencial

never once veers into pastiche territory, and also makes for a very enjoyable listen throughout, I recall a pretentious art tutor who once declared that every abstract painter would eventually feel compelled, as he had, to 'paint their way through the entire history of abstract art' - presumably this meant turning in an obligatory Kandinsky pastiche after dashing off a few Russian Constructivist copies. Frith's achievement here is to have transcended any such banal copyist self-consciousness, and almost effortlessly created three very fine works that stand up in their own right. With Cage, he has worked his way right into the skin of that playful modernist, adapting appropriate chance techniques and weaving some random readings from the master into the finished music. Strikingly, this results in the phrase 'Don't you think there's enough?' inserted over a percussion break which suddenly drops out as if on cue, bringing the piece to a close.

Frith manipulated and edited the materials into a lush, spacey production, full of unexpected turns and crash-collision edits; yes, avant-garde music can be fun! He also played most of it, working on modern computer technology keyboard assisted equipment, supported by some very able players: Christian Kaya and Claudio Puntin on clarinets, Heike Liss and Bernd Settelmeyer on percussion, and Bernd Weber on voice. I would recommend this great music to those who find Frith's guitar playing in some way annoying and clever, although I am not such a one. Frith should need no introduction as member of Henry Cow, one third of the Art Bears, duettist of long standing with Chris Cutler (check out the splendid *Live Volume 2* CD on ReR CCFF2), compiler of the superlative Guitar Solos LPs for Caroline records in the 1970s, member of Skeleton Crew with Tom Cora, guest player with The Residents (on *The Commercial Album*) and reliable hard-working stalwart of great unusual music wherever it is to be found. This suite is a deliberate move away from anything to do with rock music, represents another step in Frith's exploration of the possibilities afforded by keyboards and computer

programming, and was written specifically for dancer Amanda Miller; the music was premiered between 1993 and 1996 in dance theatres in London and Germany

Nocturnal Emissions, *ABC (Alien Black Cat)* Tesendalo, *Spanferkel* Musical Tragedies, TRAGEDY 050 (MT-391) 7" single (1998)

Blimey. As a rule I find shaped discs to be a little pointless. At best a Geri Spice shaped record is only going to be as good as the music on it, which to these ears stands a chance of being characteristically 'bang on' as Terry Thomas might have put it. At the other end of the scale, a certain silly group who shall remain nameless are still boringly suspect purveyors of tedium, despite releasing a record shaped like (groan) a German helmet - specifically, of the kind found on heads (rather than in the trousers) of second World War combatants.

Anyway, not only is this pressed on lovely splatter effect vinyl, but it's shaped like a circular saw. Very impressive! Furthermore, once the novelty of this has waned and you get around to playing the thing, the music is quite capable of holding up its end of the bargain. Nocturnal Emissions provide a short rhythmic piece, rich in atmosphere, and evocative of its vaguely Fortean Times subject. It reminds me a little of Muslingauze, though I state this with caution as everything seems to remind me a little of Muslingauze at the moment - even the new Cleopatra single ('Life Ain't Easy', and what a cracker it is to be sure). Tesendalo (or Peter Schuster, if that rings any bells out there) provides a few intense minutes' worth of loosely ambient electronics, which doesn't remind me so much of Muslingauze as of er...Nocturnal Emissions around the time of the *Stoneface* LP, which is no bad thing.

So, whether your bag be brooding electronics, or colourful novelty items, this is recommended. Care should be taken when cleaning this disc with your dust removal thingy, which may end up chopped into small pieces. It's probably wise to watch your fingers as well.

WAR ARROW

*From Earthly Delights, PO Box 2,
Lostwithiel, Cornwall PL22 0YY*

God has no Colour

Dub Music and Rastafarianism - and the music of Yabby U and Lee Perry

Spirits Drifting

Let's start with ghosts...ghosts of remembered dub music on the radio. Like anybody with a pair of ears in the early 1980s, I first heard reggae and dub music on John Peel's radio show. Occasionally a transcendent moment of dub would make me pause. One instrumental contained a trace of the echo-chambered lyric...'love and affection' stated the singer, simply and directly. 'Love and affection' was then punched home with the familiar tools of the dub mixer's trade, a barrage of exciting effects that made every note, every beat, every musical moment just stand up and demand your attention.

I was vaguely aware of the influence of dub on certain (white) independent musics - for example Dennis Bovell was called in to produce The Slits. The Clash made it into the charts with 'Bank Robber', and Adrian Sherwood displayed his dub techniques on The New Age Steppers first LP. 'High Ideals and Crazy Dreams!' wailed Mark Stewart to a lonely pair of ears stuck in a Coventry bedsit, blaring out through my JVC cassette radio. 'Whether you really appreciated that or not depends on how good your radio is I suppose', equivocated the Peel man. Darn right; I have a much better sound system now, and the kind of speakers that respond with glee and enthusiasm to any rich and fruity sound source. Those twin towers of cone and wire have been waiting for the day when they could get their teeth into a good bit of Dub music on CD. At time of writing I can't wait to slam yet another **Blood and Fire** compilation into the deck and feed my 'boys' the sonic T-bone steaks they crave, like War Arrow lovingly feeding dead beetles to his collection of Venus fly-traps.

Is not the principle of dub mixing based on a simple 'ghost' - the effect of memory? You were hearing a sound...now it drops out. The other sounds stand out in sharp relief, gasping with surprise to have been left standing to fend for themselves. Only when our living relatives and friends die, might we notice the gap they leave in the world. Then consider this. Take a religion whose followers develop a myth around a living person they've never met, investing him with powers and a meaning even he never knew he had...how would you react when he died? We'll find out.

He that Hath an Ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches...

Yabby U, *King Tubby's Prophecy of Dub Blood and Fire* BAFCD005 (1995)

Yabby U - also called Vivian Jackson - was known as a terrifying preacher of the Rastafarian religion, roaring his dark prophecies of the apocalypse that would descend upon the earth. His initial cue for the texts behind his *Prophecy of Dub* came from the Book of Revelations, naturally enough - but (as we'll see) it was informed by a long tradition of beliefs within the history of Rastafarianism. This superb instrumental record in fact contains no lyrics at all, but the titles such as 'Anti-Christ Rock' and 'Beware of God' give you several clues. As does the portentous, doomy sound of this astonishing production - the clarion-call of Judgment day

trumpets of Gabriel on 'Conquering Dub' occurs early on in this epic, summoning the dead to burst from their graves. Then, the minor-key, slow-moving workouts like 'Rock Vibration' and 'Beware of God' set a suitably sombre tone for a penitent man's fervent prayers. The echoed flute sounds on 'Hungering Dub' and 'Living Style' however are far more celestial, along with the drum kit simply gliding and floating through the clouds on 'Zion is Here' - a divine effect produced by slight phasing, I think. And there's another 'ghost', the washed-out remnant of a vocal track on 'Version Dub' haunting and spooking the infidel listener who cannot even hear clearly, let alone

understand, this message. All these components - along with occasional churchy organ stabs - makes for a good spiritually affecting experience, apt to put anyone in a contemplative frame of mind...'Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation'.

Originally released in 1976, this LP was the first of his collaborations with the great King Tubby; before this, Yabby U had run his own Prophets label and been issuing vocal-group records since 1972. Indeed, 'Anti-Christ Rock' even in dub form retains a trace of the doo-wop-esque vocalising chorus. Early titles like 'Conquering Lion' and 'Love of Jah' soon established Yabby U as a prime mover in the field of Jamaican roots music.

Intrigue came to me reading the sleeve notes, how Yabby U's music and world view was shaped by his highly interpretative reading of the Bible, especially the Revelation of St John the Divine. I suppose we all half-understood reggae was a religious music of the Rastafarians, but what's exactly behind





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these Book of Revelation quotes? Yabby U seemed to be onto something personal and weird, not just some bible-quoting nutcase...hinting at the destiny of the Black race, prophesied in the Old Testament...and making extravagant claims for the power and importance of Dub and Reggae music. Parallels are drawn between the divine scrolls in revelation, the Dead Sea scrolls, and dub music itself - emphasising the nature of the physical medium for the transmission of The Word - 'Our Bible is music. It is wax upon record, like how theirs was wax upon stone'.

And Lee Perry, how to account for a man of this self-determination, this simple yet wise crazy like a fox-ness, his extravagant poetry shading into his exotic life, and a back catalogue it was impossible to come to terms with. There was something deep going on here all right.

But there remained a hard-core of resistance to slavery, and various uprisings and rebellions against white rule between the 17th and 19th centuries were frequent. At first, they were simply weird - escaped slaves living in the hill country, called themselves The Maroons (meaning 'the fierce ones') and fought battles against the white English rulers. In 1760, there appeared an obeah man called Tacky, who led a thousand slaves to rise up. Leaders stirred up the faithful using religious language and ideas, locking into that collective dream of freedom that still lived in the minds of free men. Sam Sharpe and Paul Bogle, for example, were Native Baptist ministers who preached an ideal of equality before God for the black man - and they led two rebellions in the 19th century. Alexander Bedward was slightly less militant, but still advocated a form of black supremacy in his Baptist Free Church,

which he founded in 1895. Like Yabby U, he saw visions of the impending holocaust which would wipe white man off the face of the earth.

Amongst Jamaicans, a private mythology about their homeland Africa had begun to evolve. Before Rastafarianism proper begins to



King of Kings, Lord of Lords

Rastafarianism: This religion evolved in fits and starts in an unusually small country. Jamaica was an island with a history of slavery. The Arawak Indians, the original inhabitants, had been virtually eliminated under Spanish rule; when the British arrived to take over the island in 1655, they found the Spanish (who'd been there for over 150 years) had already been transporting African slaves. The British continued to do so, bringing thousands of West African slaves to Jamaica, thus forming a black population. Incidentally, 'West Indian' is probably not a helpful term; as Andy Martin has stressed, a more accurate term for this population might be 'Afro-Caribbean'.

The African population of Jamaica retained a dream of freedom in their homeland - sharply contrasted with the realities of life in slavery. They preserved an African folk religion in Jamaica, until about the early 19th century; then you get this influx of non-conformist missionaries, setting up churches. Some blacks joined these sects, leading to a curious variety of Afro-Christian religions, co-existing with the more mainstream Missionary churches. By the 1860s, the intensity of religious fervour led to the outbreak of what has been identified as Revival Religion - a uniquely Afro-Christian movement, which prevailed until about 1929, when you get the Pentecostal churches from America coming in.

emerge, however, there came the Black Leader Marcus Garvey - whose ideas prefigured most of the central tenets of Rasta. Garvey never thought of himself as a religious or theological man - he just had a developed sense of African history, which started early in his life during a visit to London. He returned to his homeland Jamaica in 1914, there to found the Universal Negro Improvement Association. When he went to America in 1916, he set up a branch of the UNIA in Harlem, delivering powerful and stirring speeches in his Liberty Hall headquarters. Ethiopia was the 'God' of this movement; the freedom and redemption of Africa was its goal. Garvey's symbolical flag was red, black and green, symbolising past bloodshed, pride in skin colour, and hope for new life in Africa. This was in fact a real desire for some - but not all - displaced black men, not just in Jamaica but throughout the world. There was a desire to make Africa a nation of compassion and support for their fellows; emigre pilgrims there would become Founding Fathers. Africa began to assume the shape of a religious symbol. Psalm 68 became Garvey's theme song - 'Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God'. Garvey predicted the rise of Haile Selassie, saying 'look to Africa, when a black king shall be crowned, for the day of deliverance is near'.

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RAS TAFARI MAKONNEN WAS crowned Emperor of Ethiopia in November 1930, assuming the title Haile Selassie I - King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Elect of God and the Conquering Lion of Judah. Followers of Garveyism noted this event, which became in their eyes a fulfilment of his prophecy. Studying the Bible convinced them that he was, in fact, a living incarnation of God - a theology developed by other ministers and preachers. Leonard Howell was one - in 1933 the Jamaican Government placed him under arrest for 'preaching a revolutionary doctrine'. By 1940 he had about 500 followers living in a private estate called Pinnacle, as part of his Ethiopian Salvation Society. He went to jail when the police found the large amounts of marijuana being grown in the fields there.

But Pinnacle dwellers went back to Kingston, and by the mid-1950s these dreadlocked men were helping to spread Rastafarian beliefs. Little informal Brotherhoods were formed; in 1958 3,000 Rastas gathered at a convention in Kingston. It became significant enough to warrant an official investigation and report by the University College of the West Indies, who suggested that the Government should help Jamaicans who wished to migrate to Africa. There were rumours that Haile Selassie welcomed this, having made a gesture of solidarity by setting aside 500 acres of space in Ethiopia. When he landed at the airport in Jamaica on 21 April 1966, there were thousands of faithful waiting to meet him. A profound development followed; he convinced the brethren they should not emigrate to Ethiopia until they had liberated the people of Jamaica. From that day onwards, 21 April has always been celebrated as a holy day by Rastas.

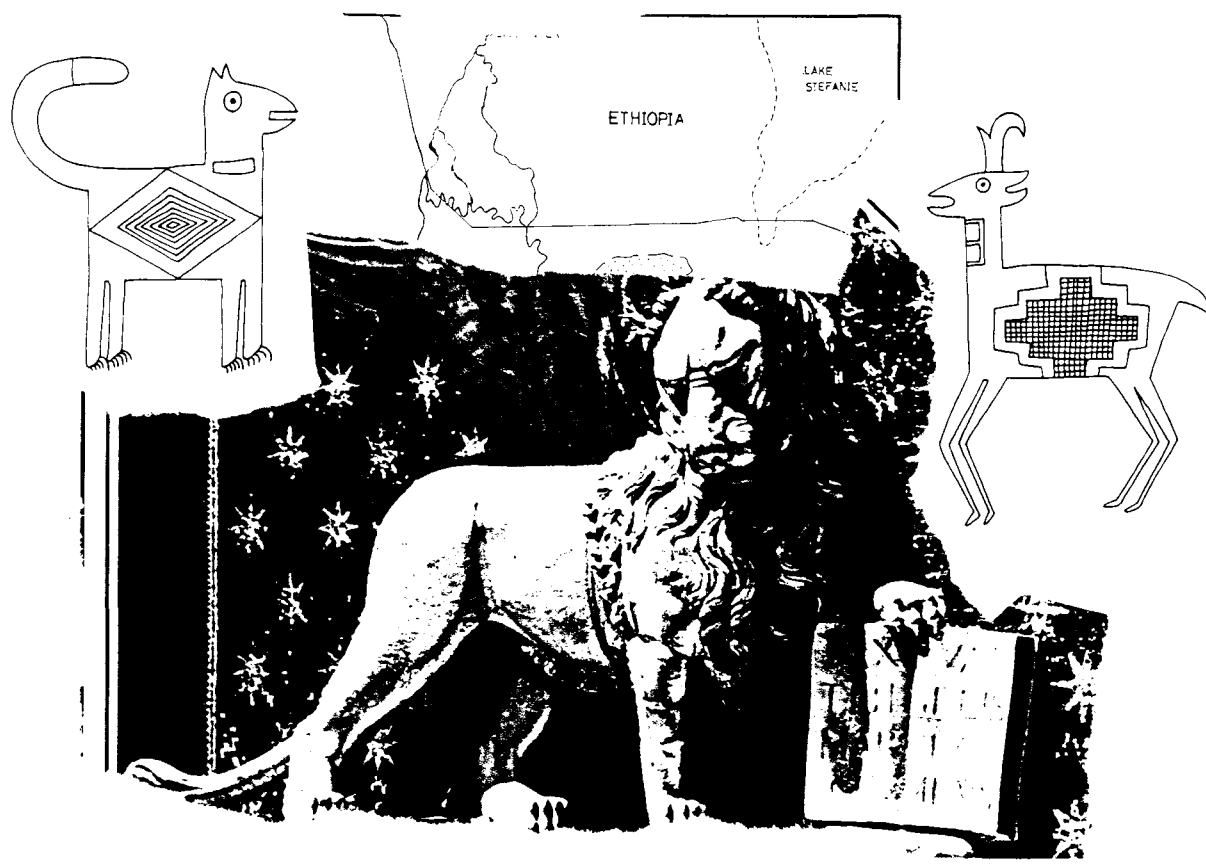
When the Lion of Judah actually died in 1975, this event (if anything) strengthened the movement; he assumed a mythical status. Some said his death was fabricated; some said it was irrelevant because in any case he was personification of God. Some claimed he had assumed a spirit form and would be even more powerful.

THE LORD will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem...

'In the juvenescence of the Year came Christ the Tiger' - born-again Catholic T S Eliot plugged into a familiar symbol with that piece of poetry. Haile Selassie's becoming a Christ-like figure is not inept. The Jamaican man came to terms with Christianity. The organic weaving together of personal and cultural details by the Rasta Man, with the texts he found in the Bible. He did not ignore them altogether, but made them his own - through a combination of meditation, holy awe, self-determinism and what I see as a form of inspired dementia. The core of Rastafarianism is the experience of 'dread', effectively a confrontation between two imperatives: the religious and the racial. They found Biblical texts to support their idea that Solomon was black, that Jesus was black; after all, Garvey had stated 'God has no colour' and 'Jesus had the blood of all races in his veins'. From this comes the idea that Rasta brethren are in exile in Jamaica, they are the true spiritual descendants of black Israelites cast out from their homeland.

Certainly, this is based on a rather selective and very interpretative reading of biblical texts. But lest we forget, the 'dominant' mainstream religions (I mean largely Christian and European) have never been above their own strains of specialised, scholarly fantasising. The Stations of the Cross is a High Catholic concept, extrapolating quite a lot of unnecessary (almost fetishistic) detail which simply isn't present in any of the Gospels. Maryology - the transfiguration of the Virgin Mary into a devotional object, through powerful and rich imagery. Medieval glosses (interpretations of scripture which verge on fantasising) can have a lasting currency.

Of course there's many things within the belief system of the Rasta man, which we can only mention briefly - like the



continuing faith in Africa as a dream ideal continent, they prefer to call it Ethiopia - the heartshaped land, it is Heaven in their eyes. From Leonard Howell comes the more radical activist side - hatred for the White man and a desire for revenge; belief in the superiority of the African race; and the negation of the government and legal organisations of Jamaica. The belief in the power and purity of nature, from which comes vegetarianism, smoking ganja (the wisdom weed, the healing of the nations, the holy herb) and growing the dreadlocks, a sign of the holy Covenant with Jah - read Numbers 6:5 - a manifestation of natural life, and a proud association with the lion's mane...

The 'sermon' and the 'theology'

Listen again to the Prophecy of Dub and it makes a bit more sense. The significance of Africa as a religious symbol has been under the noses of anyone here who's even just glimpsed a Bob Marley or an Aswad album cover. Photographs and iconic images of Haile Selassie are to be found on other reggae and dub LP sleeves, and lurking subliminally in the detritus of Lee Perry's studio. Jah Shaka album covers state unequivocally that his music has been ordained and commissioned by the Lord Emperor Haile Selassie himself. Among the many Old Testament quotations you can find in reggae music, a personal favourite is Prince Alla's 'Salty Dub', a charming song-story about the fate of Lot's wife.

When Babylon is used in a Reggae lyric, what does it mean? Well, a symbol of a symbol - because in the Book of Revelations 'Babylon' is used to signify the Roman Empire in a thinly-veiled attack on the prevailing power structure. Following that tradition the rastas began to equate Babylon/Roman empire with the British Empire; the very systems that kept the black man enslaved. Any decadent, oppressive Church and State mechanism qualifies as Babylon. And it can just as easily be extended to include the American empire, with its own wonderful history of massacre and displacement of the Native American.

Lee Perry shows a self-determination characteristic, a strong atavistic desire to make the black man into virtually everything - the reincarnation as any of his oppressed heroes, including Native Americans for example. He does it all in such a colourful mad way you gotta love the guy - but he's more than a rum eccentric, a great interview - he's a

magus, time traveller, living proof of what an organic religious belief can do to a man, change him inwardly and outwardly.

In a dub the vocal part is stripped down like all the other instruments - it leaves but a trace of the original lyric. One phrase from the song is emphasised, showcased by echo or reverb, standing alone from the beat in a little eddy of loop effects. For example, 'You're in Heaven but you're living in Hell' (on 'Drums of Africa', Prince Jammy and the Aggroators) - followed either side by precious moments of music - dub gives you a breathing space, allowing you to concentrate on that part of the message, let it resonate. If the song side of the single is like a sermon, then the dub of that song becomes a theological interpretation of it; not a gloss on the text, rather it selects and forefronts the one phrase that somehow conveys the whole substance of the song.

Dub mixing is so brilliantly simple I can't imagine how I ever lived without records like this around before. Parts of the track are dropped in and out using fader levers; special effects (like echo or flange) are added to selected sound events. So far so good, only the mixer / producer is doing it by a mysterious, instinctive process. Unlike many modern production techniques, where treatments are very often shaped by the 'narrative' content of the song, dub is as far as I can see a nearly abstract process - selecting elements blind, from a continuous watertight rhythm track, and mixing them in and out as the man behind the controls sees fit. That this was done on perhaps rather primitive equipment only enhances the whole thing. The range of

options open to a producer were simple - fade levers, pan pots - the whole process of engaging with the mixing desk becomes a physical act, playing the desk like another instrument. Conversely, today's digital recording techniques offer perhaps too many options - you've only got to look at CuBase, the Windows-based programme, to see how every aspect of a recording can now be tweaked until all the heart has been bled out of it. There's something so physically challenging about this dub stylee. It's the old story of making a virtue out of necessity.

Each dub follows a dynamic of constant movement, with the added possibility of flying off at a tangent at any instant - as against an average 'composed' pop-song structure, which doesn't allow much room for deviation from the verse-chorus-middle eight. A dub record doesn't actively start so much as appear out of thin air, spins around like some rare natural phenomenon (perhaps a dust devil revolving in slow motion, or a fountain which freezes up) then disappears again, leaving an indelible mark of something quite wonderful.

Of course, there's a more prosaic side to dub's evolution - and one we hope to go into if we can examine the work of, say, King Tubby in a bit more detail. The competitive culture of Kingston dance halls. The use of records as broadcast news...an instantaneous communication device, only a fun one too. The democratic possibility of making your answer record the next evening. The soft wax pressing of a new mix called a 'dub'. It was a local and indigenous culture, never intended to



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last much outside of dance halls. And the drugginess - the lucid connections a mind can make when it's been stoned by a spliff the size of a tree root. Perhaps dub music is indeed the original black psychedelic music crossed with doo-wop, as Edwin Pouncey sees it. 'Go away and buy some Augustus Pablo LPs,' he advised me. 'Then you'll know what it's all about...'

Lee 'Scratch' Perry, *Arkology*

Island Jamaica. CRNCD
6/524 379-2 (1997)

Arkology, a triple CD box set is an utterly crucial compilation with superb booklet and notes by Steve Barrow (the man behind the Blood and Fire label in Manchester) more than welcome to a novice like myself who had no idea where to begin with Dub music and wanted to do some justice to Lee Perry. Having spun through the set and not been disappointed with one single track here, my only dilemma now is how to continue collecting his music efficiently.

Here are some songs that now have a near-iconic status, articulating many of the political and spiritual aspirations and inspirations of the Rasta as outlined above. No doubt will be familiar to anyone regardless of race creed or colour who strolled within 100 feet of Portobello Road in the mid-to-late 1970s. 'War In a Babylon' by Max Romeo; 'Don't Blame on I' by the Congos; 'Police and Thieves' by Junior Murvin, and others by Errol Walker, The Heptones, The Upsetters, Mikey Dread...

Here also are are Dub versions of pure genius and unexpected connections, now audible in a way that lets us appreciate the man's innate facility for outsmarting the dumb and primitive technology in his studio - unlocking not

Island's *Super Ape* LP. The famous pictures of the Black Ark Studio bedecked and studded with a dazzling layout of secret texts. Only Harry Smith's alchemical and numerological collections come close to this, Lee

Perry as the magus disguising his books of rules and magic talismans as mere pieces of junk. All this energy is there on the recordings, if you can bear to hear it. Lee Perry's music is necessary - use it, and use his personality, to connect yourself to your sense of insanity. It's a helpful and friendly madness he offers, passing on a simultaneous deep fix from a hit of ganja and all the empowering compassion of Rastafarianism. The cover image here is so utterly striking, showing his face deep in a trance of mystical ecstasy, while his body is in an impossible posture, gracefully dancing and yet fully relaxed, his tendons made of rubber. In one sense the troubled history of Rastafarianism could be said to have been leading up to a man like Lee Perry, all the varying pathways meeting at



only the human voice of the hunks of metal and plastic, but seeking their very souls and coaxing them into miraculous behaviour. More than water into wine, here be magnetic tape coated with pure gold. It's a commonplace now to speak of the 'against all odds' factor of dub music, but people who speak of this sort of thing are technology fetishists in my view. Some incredible 'alternate' cuts - eg 'Vibrate On' by Augustus Pablo on the Dub Adventurer disc should be more than enough to open the gates of Heaven for you.

Here also are images. The jaw-dropping Tony Wright sleeve art for versions of

the psychic crossroads of his kaleidoscopic spirit. Even the ghost of Tacky, the Obeah man, is discernible in Perry's career, in the affair of the notorious voodoo vengeance said to have been enacted against Chris Blackford, the head of Island Records. (Though the commentary notes are silent, a chicken feather and bone talisman have been added to the CD booklet centre-spread here ... nuff said). Of course, Perry was (and remains) a self-publicist and poser too - loved playing up to the camera (or tape recorder), vain as they come and probably something of a breadhead, truth be known. We can't all be saints!

The rise of modern dub in the UK

No mini-survey would be complete without at least mentioning UK producer Adrian Sherwood and his On-U Sound record label. Some purists might warn you away from these records, but it would be a big mistake to deny the mighty pleasures he can summon up. A serious collector of dub and reggae music since it began to become available in this country, Sherwood the connoisseur has somehow reincarnated himself as the spirit of any number of great dub mixers. Working with a mixture of black artists like African Headcharge, the dreadlocked Ari Upp from the Slits in New Age Steppers, and paranoid leftist whiteys Mark Stewart and Tackhead, Sherwood has remained true to the principles of dub music yet exploited all manner of more sophisticated recording equipment and effects. He's no stranger to sampling, even using football crowds and chants to great effect on Barmy Army. But he's never cheated; almost everything recorded has been played in real time, by razor sharp musicians - often the 'house band' of Keith LeBlanc et al.....Just about the only component of dub that hasn't made it intact is, I guess, the religion, the rastafarianism - but the imperatives are different for this trip.

Has dub mixing not been a shaping influence in much dance music, what everyone's listening to now? Kevin Martin is one guy to ask, and his compilation *Macro Dub Infection* (2 volumes so far) is a major treat to the ears. The principles of dynamics and exciting effects caused by absent sound, only writ large with digital effects and modern sound equipment. A trans-national sampling of instrumental musics al of which serve to bolster up the Techno-Animalist's world view. Each episode is a solid construction with deep-cast steel foundations, permitting any amount of weird stone cladding to be fitted around it.



MEPHISTO-BEATS

**Roni Size and Reprazent, *New Forms*
Talkin' Loud Records [Mercury] 534 933-2 (1997)**

Perhaps somewhat overplayed and overhyped for the last season, this remains a reasonably good and entertaining record of drum 'n' bass music overlayed with strange hippie-ish lyrics, foreign sound effects, and delivered with a punchy dynamic production. It's loud, it's exciting, it's vibrantly brilliant. Bristol's Roni Size and his team of ball-busters Reprazent have successfully popularized this modern electronic music, perhaps effecting a way to bring it up from the sweaty underground clubs, form a bridge between the deepest deep-core music and the more 'average' civilian listener. I need hardly tell you they're certainly making a commercial success out of it, judging by the high visibility - Mercury Prize winners with this double CD last year; several single releases like 'Brown Paper Bag' and 'Watching Windows' in multiple variant sleeves and mixes; media coverage galore; used on a Channel 4 arts programme on Brit-art prizewinners; and a cryptic TV ad, which states this record is the 'Sergeant Pepper' of the 1990s. (The modern world has resurrected so many dumb clichés that even this stupid Sergeant Pepper reference- long tabooed as the laziest copout of lazy journalism - has a certain naff cachet to it, seemingly.)

The success has been to make something compellingly listenable - impeccable production values give it warmth and approachableness. The tautness and utter aggression of drum'n'bass is still present on every other cut, but there are quieter episodes, fragments of songs, tunes. These tunes are so minimal, they're nearly diagrammatic. If you look at a rail network map, your mind can just about pick out the shape of the British Isles, because you're so familiar with it. But with Roni Size, all we get is a skeleton, like a Giacometti sculpture casting a silhouette against a white sheet lit by an arc lamp. Indeed, it's like the piece at the 'Sensation' exhibition last year - the motorway network of this country painstakingly cut from a roadmap with a scalpel, to leave a 2-millimetre thin web of lines dangling like a shapless mobile.

This record has ambitions. You sense there is some attempt to redefine accepted notions of conventional popular musical form. At the very least the listener is always kept surprised by the baffling dynamics, the extreme dub-influenced dropouts, and dare I say it - the inconsequentiality of so many pieces. Some appear for only fleeting moments of pleasure, bewitching and fully-crafted sound worlds which spin on to another orbit. It isn't inconsequentiality, so much as a kaleidoscopic, anti-linear way of delivering a tune, ignoring verse-chorus structure and withholding the conventional 'payoff'.

At least one trademark element is the sound of the actual bass - which I believe is (most of the time) an acoustic upright bass and played in real time. Not a sequencer. The same goes for the drums - full acoustic kit and played with military fanatical precision. Not a drum machine. Whatever aggressive, martial forces these two instrument muster is frequently offset by the friendlier lighter elements: the acoustic guitar flourishes are as welcome here as an Angel Food Cake. The highly soulful voice of Onalee delivering fragmentary exhortations of an uplifting, positive nature... 'Change My Life', states one track simply. I suspect I'm not about to invest heavily in drum'n'bass records as a result of this, so it hasn't quite 'changed my life', but *New Forms* is good - if you haven't heard it already (it's something that's kinda hard to escape) then give it a spin.

DJ Spooky That Subliminal Kid, *Synthetic Fury* EP

New York, Asphodel 0110 (1998)

Scary...nuclear attack sirens, backward voices and samples from the *Psycho* soundtrack by Bernard Herrman in the opening preliminaries push all the panic buttons, setting the passive listener on edge, and the remaining EP segues into vistas of desolation and ruination delineated in solid clumps of clogged, treated sound. The title track is generated from music by Panacea, and offers the most aggressive trip here, a real William Gibson nightmare ride complete with the voices of lethal aliens eating toxic waste. The cyberpunk future vision is however tempered with occasional glimpses of a 1950's World Fair version of same, valve-driven amplifiers and analogue synths painting a picture of the stars inside a planetarium. When the hyperfast drumbeat vanishes I don't miss it one bit, as I'm sucked into a fifth dimension through weird long up-and-down tones, then whirled through a

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confusing melange of backward tapes. A welter of squelchy souns and stuck records re-announce the slight return of the drum and bass section. There's a lot going on here, if you can bear to listen.

'Synaptic Dissonance' may not be an exceptional track, but as a title it just might describe the DJ Spooky aesthetic. Tiring of the 'Illbient' tag worked to a bone by media hacks, he now prefers 'Not Well-Bient', but the third track here will generate all those queasy feelings you've been yearning for a record to induce in your cortex. The way the rhythms of three ill-fitting tracks don't quite hang together, barely coinciding - combined with the thick fug of layers of foreign noise samples, is intoxicating. This record will unhinge and unfocus your mind. You can't quite reach the carrot that's dangled before you; a bizarre way to achieve listening pleasure, but it works.

Drenched throughout with enjoyable dub techniques and ingenious samples, this record is overall far more enjoyable and dynamic than the somewhat muddy *The Dialogic Project*, and more menacing. The sleeve art is a yellow and black nuclear waste hazard warning, linked by collage to Bar-Code technology gone insane and an imaginary map of the world that puts the USA at the centre of an ironic 'global oligopoly' - only to be cancelled out by a mystical graffiti sign. And the use of scratchy old records is ever more effective; even if you can't recognise a single source, it still evokes nostalgia and seems somehow 'ancient' in this context, like a fragment of a lost age. At each fadeout you will be left floating in a sea of these vinyl crackles, adrift in the flotsam from an oil tanker wreck.

Spanner Thru Ma Beatbox, *Spanner Thru Ma Beatbox* Earthly Delights, EARTH003 LP (1987)

There was a time many moons ago when everybody from Throbbing Gristle to The Wurzels was claiming to have invented House music. Genesis P Orridge is notable for having shot himself in the foot with both barrels on this score. This became apparent when Psychic TV released their 'house' albums and everyone realised that the innovation was not so much the creation of 'house' music as 'outside bog' music. Nocturnal Emissions are also amongst the numerous inventors of dance as we know it, though as 1983's *Viral Shredding* album is still probably the funkiest thing made by whitey up until that time, they can probably be forgiven. Spanner Thru Ma Beatbox is a collaboration between an Emission and (as I've been given to believe) some chap from 400 Blows - another group who invented House music. 400 Blows in their day were the authors of some mind-bogglingly fine stuff. Sadly these musical gems comprised about 15% of their output, and the rest was a little disappointing. Or fucking awful, if you will. So I approached this, over ten years after the event, with a degree of trepidation. It might be crap, but worse still it could be painfully dated crap.

So, what a relief that it is neither. The 'house style' anonymity of the cover, and the statement that the tracks purportedly run at 111 and 113 beats per minute, are slightly misleading. This is dance music that you'd have great difficulty dancing to. I was expecting Psychic TV style embarrassment, but thankfully there is no resemblance. Spanner Thru Ma Beatbox is closer in composition to early Tackhead. Keith LeBlanc and Mark Stewart, which should at least indicate what is meant here by dance music you can't dance to. Mark Stewart in particular has been vaguely lumped in with the groovy-assed-move-busting genre, which is odd because

tracks like 'Hell Is Empty' could probably clear a floor as fast as anything by Merzbow. Which is sort of what we have here. There's a lot of BAAD rhythms here, starting, stopping, breaking down, nipping out for a fag, blowing up, and falling over each other. If you tried dancing to this you'd probably break your legs, although that's not a criticism. Spanner Thru Ma Beatbox is a well chosen name. It implies what this sounds like: crunchy, dangerous, and fascinating. I wouldn't like to say whether or not the authors invented House music, but on the strength of this I think they probably invented The Prodigy.

WAR ARROW

*Buy now while stocks last from: Earthly Delights, PO
Box 2, Lostwithiel, Cornwall PL22 0YY*

All Saints, *All Saints* London Records 828979.4 (1997)

Yup. THAT All Saints. For what it's worth, All Saints' CD deserves your attention - not on the strength of some subtle fusion of Stockhausen with Controlled Bleeding, but rather because it's just too shit-hot to ignore. Musically, you may be surprised to know, it is actually very much on the ball. The instrumentation is sparse, allowing space for the octet of golden tonsils on display, without sounding weedy or predictable. There's plenty of fooling around with turntables, and some wonderful use of sampling (particularly the bizarre plinky plonky noises which dominate 'Take The Key'), all executed with military precision, and analogue fatness, for want of a more comprehensive description. Rarely does something so deceptively simple sound so big and warm.

The songs. You've probably heard a few and already formed an opinion, and if it's in the negative I'd suggest you clean your ears for a better listen. They bear closer scrutiny. Not everything here is absolutely brilliant but, er...most of it is. The sheer intensity of some of these songs is surprising, equal to anything by Swans or Ramleh in their own smouldering way. 'I Know Where it's At' and 'War of Nerves' in particular could take the paint off a Sherman tank at fifty paces, and these tracks are probably a good example of what Portishead *think* they sound like. Unsurprisingly there are some er...'suggestive' lyrics, but nothing as pointlessly grubby as, for example, Mark Morrison, who is after all only Roy Chubby Brown without the laffs.

Some of you may have mistaken All Saints for a bargain version of the Spice Girls. Don't be fooled. Beyond musical excellence, and similar sets of X chromosomes, we're talking about two very different groups. This may be a hugely successful product, but that doesn't automatically render it less worthy, or interesting, or ass-bustingly fine, than any other artist on your shelf. There's thought and love and care gone into its conception. Also, they're a damn sight easier on the eye than Skullflower, Whitehouse, etcetera.

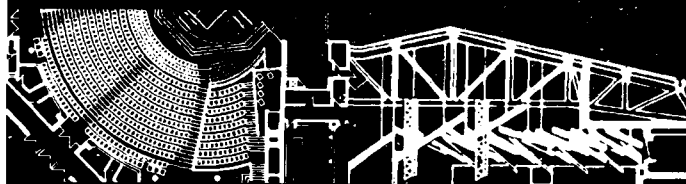
Some have suggested that the most exciting innovations in music are presently to be found in the dance scene (and nowhere else!). Such meaningless gobbledegook is similar to the pronouncement that 'Comedy is the new rock'n'roll', and should be regarded with the contempt it deserves. Should someone venture to express such a sentiment in your vicinity, simply play them All Saints and watch them wither and die.

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Akira Ifukube - Walking in Godzilla's footsteps

By War Arrow

MOST PEOPLE KNOW somebody who's a mine of obscure and useless information, that shady character who pipes up at the least appropriate moment to enlighten all and sundry about Princess Anne's irrational fear of oxtail soup. However, I am lucky to know several guardians to repositories of obscure, but interesting information. One such fellow arrived on my doorstep, a number of years ago as I write, for a Godzilla session - having been lured by my recent purchase of several videos starring the radioactive behemoth. With a full pot of tea, and a copious supply of fags, we sat down to enjoy *Destroy All Monsters*, one of the least realistic pictures in the extensive Godzilla lexicon. As the opening credits rolled, my companion fell strangely silent. He was clearly concentrating on the intensive soundtrack, the qualities of which I had scarcely noticed up until now, perhaps in my fervoured anticipation of seeing Tokyo 'discomknockerated' (Ken Dodd) for the umpteenth time. Then, as the composer momentarily received his on-screen credit, my friend's eyebrows dramatically relocated themselves to some point just below his hairline as he exclaimed 'Akira Ifukube! How unusual!' As I later learned, it seems that Akira Ifukube is better known as a teacher than as a composer in his own right. Hmm. 'Yes, how very strange', I reciprocated with a vague sense of bewilderment.

Some three years later, I have become fascinated by the man who scored Godzilla - that is, he's the author of the beast's soundtrack music, and nothing to do with the shady purchase of illicit 80 metre-high fire-breathing reptiles in bars on the bad side of town. Repeated exposure to large quantities of Godzilla celluloid has left me in no doubt as to the genius of the man who provides the more memorable passages of soundtrack. However I am, unfortunately, only a little wiser as to the facts of his existence - beyond an association with big radioactive monsters. Akira Ifukube was born in 1914 in the tiny Japanese village of Hokkaido. This was a locale with a significant indigenous Ainu populace, and a thriving heritage of traditional folk music thus. He began his musical career at school as part of a student orchestra, and followed this through to music college. The improvisational style of the Ainu folk music that had accompanied his upbringing granted him a certain intuitive insight denied to his peers, whose training had come from a purely classical European tradition. Within the halls of academia he is best renowned as a tutor, having encouraged and instructed a number of Japan's best known composers. Amongst his most celebrated pupils are Teizo Matsumara, and Maki Ishii.

Ifukube has stated that the works of Stravinsky and Faure inspired him to become a composer. His association with the King of Monsters (and it should be obvious to whom I am referring - King Kong doesn't count, because he's a merchant) came about in the late 1940s, when Toho Studios commissioned a score for the first Godzilla film, *Godzilla, King of the Monsters* (d. Ishiro Honda, 1954). Due largely to the wackiness of the later films, it is often overlooked quite how dark the original story was (providing one ignores the irritating and pointless insertion

of Raymond Burr into American releases of both this film, and its superb 1994 remake). This first film was very much a grim horror story, and presented obvious and disturbing metaphors for the perils of nuclear power. The bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima were and are understandably still strong in the Japanese psyche, and perhaps provide the subtext of Tokyo's repeated decimation in these films, even during the years of Godzilla's move towards light entertainment.

In later years we have been delighted by Godzilla's increasing eccentricity. He stomps in to save the world from some new foe, who ends up being used as a punch-bag and then a trampoline by our jubilant green hero, as he bravely fights off the urge to underplay his victory. He patiently admonishes his offspring (whose mother has remained consistently conspicuous by her absence) for a poor showing in radioactive fire-breathing class. Godzilla even manages the occasional deep-voiced conversation with Rodan, the giant pteranodon whose physiology seems to have been determined not by the information encoded within his genes, but by doodles from the notepad next to Spike Milligan's telephone - unless it's just my video machine playing up. But such ribaldry was absent from *Godzilla, King of the Monsters*.

In addition to Ifukube's association with Godzilla through his music scores, he also created many of the original sound effects. The roar of the big greenish one was produced by pulling on the strings of a contrabass whilst wearing gloves coated in resin. Ifukube came across the sound for the monster's footfalls when he accidentally stepped upon a formidably primitive coiled speaker. So not only did he walk in Godzilla's footsteps - he created them!

In the post-war years the Japanese film industry was notably more frugal than its American counterpart. The Toho studio imposed quite strict limits. For the original film score Ifukube had only a matter of days in which to compose and record his contributions, often working from little more than a description of the visual events requiring musical accompaniment. Similarly, the recording environment forced certain compromises in terms of the small number of players that could be accommodated in a studio. Ifukube's basic themes have been reused and updated time and again, most recently in *Godzilla Vs MechaGodzilla* (d. Takao Okawara, 1993). These themes in fact comprise parts of an orchestral work - *Symphonic Fantasia*, of which a fully orchestrated version is at last available to those lucky enough to be able to find it.

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Hearing it only from the soundtracks, one is led to suspect that *Symphonic Fantasia's* modest fourteen minutes are a cobbling together, a mixture of disparate passages of music. But this impression loses any credibility in the face of the complete work. On the contrary, the continuity is seamless - leading the listener through the portentous, implied terror of the opening bars, through quiet and lighter passages, to the subtly emotive military tattoos.

Some have claimed Ifukube for Japan's answer to Hollywood's John Williams. True, both are famous for their respective countries' best known films, but the comparison stretches no further. Where Williams' music is mawkish and gushing, that of Ifukube displays a gentle and stoic dignity. Ifukube at his darkest is, quite frankly, devastating; when he suggests terror, one is left in no doubt that he means it - as my trousers are my witness. Any competitor from the John Williams catalogue simply sounds overstated. Williams is little more than the Charged GBH to Ifukube's Sex Pistols, if you will. As stated earlier, Ifukube's influences apparently lie with the Ainu folk music, Stravinsky, and Faure; although how much of this surfaces in *Symphonic Fantasia* is open to debate. For me, the most immediate comparisons may be made with the music of Imperial Japan. This may be a crass analogy, but his themes are unmistakably non-Western. They convey a certain grandiosity that never overpowers the subtler elements, through a great and terrible dignity which never descends into Wagnerian farce. Most notable is Ifukube's mastery of esoteric time signatures. To his credit, these are not obvious, and so the music sweeps the listener along without any sacrifice of melody or harmony on the altar of mathematical exercise. It is only on close inspection that the structure of the music reveals itself to be inordinately complex. Ifukube at his best makes one painfully aware of the limits of prose - writing about music can be like fishing about opera.

It may seem a little disrespectful to link this highly regarded and serious composer with the apparent frivolity of Godzilla films. Yet in his own country, Ifukube *can* be associated with a man dressed in a rubber dinosaur costume without any great contradiction; this is perhaps a signifier of the differences between Japanese and English culture. Perhaps the Japanese lack that tedious, Western sense of irony, which denies the possibility of appreciating a Godzilla film for what it is. We have a mental block. Art from non English-speaking cultures, which dares to appeal to a mainstream audience, is rarely evaluated on its own terms. More often we take the patronising attitude that any merit lies within its 'hilarious' distance from our own ideas of what constitutes good art. There is nothing so sickeningly insincere as the acclaim granted to a film for its 'tackiness', for being (yawn) 'so bad it's good'. Shame on us, is all I can say! I love Ifukube's music just as I love the Godzilla films he's associated with - just for different reasons. So yah-boo sucks to post-modern irony.

I CONFESS IT TAKES a great deal to muster my enthusiasm for a piece of music. On occasions I can be moved to tears - by palaeontology. The image of great bands of big, smiley-faced duckbilled hardosaurs happily bounding across the plains is something of a choker, as I know I'll never see one these huge (and I suspect rather appealing) beasts in the flesh. And houseplants! Cycads, bromeliads, and some carnivorous varieties I find equally moving. *Sarracenia Excelessis* can have me blubbing like a baby, such is its cheeky trumpet-shaped perfection. The sheer joy of watching a young *Sarracenia* grow into a giant green trombone of insect-guzzling naughtiness allows, for me, some insight into fatherhood. Music? I find very little that has so

dramatic a resonance, sadly. Shed Seven, Oasis, Primal Scream, even The Beatles (Ringo's sublime solo career notwithstanding) all leave me cold. Only the prospect of three hours stuck in a lift with Richard Littlejohn and Andrea Dworkin is slightly less enticing. Now, Mussorgsky and Killing Joke - they get the juices flowing considerably ... but Ifukube ... phew ... I don't know whether to laugh, cry, or stand to attention. It's THAT FINE!



Soundtracks scored by Akira Ifukube:

Godzilla, King of the Monsters (1954)
Rodan, The Flying Monster (1956)
The Mysterians (1957)
Varan, The Unbelievable (1958)
The Three Treasures (1959)
Battle In Outer Space (1959)
Whale God (1962)
King Kong vs Godzilla (1964)
Dagora, The Space Monster (1964)
Ghidrah, The Three-Headed Monster (1964)
Frankenstein conquers the World (1965)
Majin, Monster of Terror (1966)
War of the Gargantuas (1966)
The Return of the Giant Majin (1966)
Majin Strikes Back (1966)
King Kong Escapes (1967)
Destroy All Monsters (1968)
Latitude Zero (1969)
Godzilla's Revenge (1969)
Yog, Monster from Space (1970)
Godzilla vs Gigan (1972)
Terror of Mechagodzilla (1975)
Godzilla vs Ghidrah (1991)
Godzilla vs Mothra (1992)
Godzilla vs Mechagodzilla (1993)

*I am indebted to Mr A Martin who informs me that a compact disc containing *Symphonic Fantasia*, and another longer Ifukube composition, was released by Les Disques du Soleil et De L'Acier, CDSA 54024. Distributed by Semantic, France.*



Our Glassie Azoth

**Some discursions into Alchemy and Music
by Daffyd Roberts**

OUR GLASSIE AZOTH is an alchemical term used by many of the natural philosophers up to at least the middle of the seventeenth century. Its origin is in pseudo-Lull. The myriad authors who refer to it will have their own meaning. The matrix of alchemy is intentionally obscure. Many authors describe how other alchemists have become lost in their own labyrinths. Much of this confusion derives from the inter-changeability of terms. Thus, the mercury described may be distinct from philosophic mercury, which may

also be foam of the moon or, milk of the virgin or the swan. There is a constant desire to elucidate through use of arcane idioms and allegedly shared notions. Indeed, if we read the authorities and compare and read and compare many, many times we can find patterns and commonalities and come close to 'meaning'.

But this is a slippery and elusive business and it is highly doubtful that we are 'correct'. But we try and this in itself is important. The elision of boundaries or shared notions is not confined to the phraseology of alchemy. The alchemical narrative is one which is chaotic.

Some have it that there are three stages, nigredo, albedo, and rubedo for instance. Others insist that this order culminates in the putrefaction or blackening. Others insert a yellowing stage. The period of time required to complete the work can be three days, we will recall the obvious resonance with the Christian Passion, or again, forty days, of course both these periods of time should be [?] understood as figurative and not actual spans. Again, if we think of Ripley, there may be 12 Gates to pass through and the zodiacal impetus of this terrestrial astrology becomes clear.

Furthermore, frequently the order of the opus is fragmented within any one alchemical text and must be discerned or reconfigured. All of this is to emphasise how the myriad intentional obfuscations depict for us a state of flux. Our perceptions are keenened through a parabola of apparent oxymoronic flux. We need to map our way though a labyrinthine geography in order to come to our goal.

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The alchemy that we are interested in is a spiritual alchemy. Properly speaking this is hermetism. This body of thinking which flourished in the latter half of seventeenth century Europe drew together texts such as the *Hermetica* with contemporary tracts such as Paracelsus and Agrippa as well as, importantly to us, Philalethes and Sendivogius. The old and the new shared [an assumed] Adamic, pre-lapsarian authenticity. Thus, we discount the 'torturers of metal' who aim to trick and with subtle means 'get rich quick'. These adepts dupe and are to be discounted. Certainly, though, the origins of Egyptian alchemy focused upon the amalgamation of metallic compounds. Zosimos for instance. This can be understood though as having a distinct parallel with the ascension through a variety of spiritual gradations rather than being simply a means to an end in itself.

Being a spiritual alchemy the focus for transmutation becomes important. We may think that an internal geography of the mind is the appropriate focus. We know to think of Anameusis and Plotinus's ideas of retreating to a pristine, first white age, a pre-lapserian, pre-existent state of celestial consciousness. Although Jungian readings of alchemy predominate they have less use than is frequently assumed. The individuation process at the heart of his reading has a barren timbre for us. It is vital to realise that alchemy is not a mysticism. By this we know that the goals of alchemy are to find that uncorrupted constituent of temporality that is the *prima materia*, the philosophic mercury; it may be in its Gnostic partialities to have contact with the World Soul but it is not to know God. Maybe it can be to know of God. Alchemy, unless it is from within the Christianised tradition, exemplars being perhaps Boeheme or possibly Eugenius Philaethes, is a partial spirituality.

The matrix of many alchemists is famously to materialise the spiritual and alternatively to spiritualise the material. The solidity of the world is questioned in the quantum physics which now shows it to be one of arbitrary flux. The structures of the material are formed by particles of energy held together in patterns of insubstantiality. The interconnectedness of the world in all its aspects is of a central importance within alchemy.

The world as we see it and as we are in it is of a shared substance and much less real than we like to imagine. The processes of alchemy which strive to disclose the hidden unity of the temporal realm come close to transcending it. They can come close.

OUR GLASSIE AZOTH, BEING MERCURY being glass being sharp being shared indicates for us the self reflective probing of self-enquiry. OGA is an ongoing thing although it did originally come about as a project for an Italian tape label. Their brief was the corrosion of the natural environment. I suspect that they had larger environmental themes in mind. At that time we were renting a farmhouse in a secluded part of Wales. We were then able to play along with some of our prepared tapes through our amplifier and the physicality of the sound was, it felt, almost physical. You felt it rolling out of the house in to the farm and beyond the fields, past the cows and sheep over the stream and off over the hills. It felt part of the landscape. It wasn't as such or at least discernibly inspired by the landscape. Although along with most rational people we worry about the 'progress' of industrialisation and urbanisation, the pollution of the environment etc these are not the themes or inspirations of OGA. Likewise, whilst we have been and do like to go to places of antiquity, Bry Celli Ddu and Castelli Dinas Bran and locally Pentre Ifan burial chamber and one might be aware of their 'earth magic' they are not fundamentals in our music. At least not in its conception. Strangely, afterwards they can become so.

Weirdstone connotes both these standing stones and the philosophical stone.

Both Our glassie Azoth and Euterpe Sequence use the most basic of equipment. Four-track, reverb/delay unit, feedback, acoustic/electric guitar, woodblock, flutes. In the future we will use some computer stuff. This seems an inevitable shame!! However, there is only so far that a particular methodology can get you. If we can we would like to make some or find some

organic constructs that display their innate sonic signature but this will be away in the future.

All the music—or none if you prefer—is heard—and then comes an attempt to concretise it. The inability to articulate what is conceived lead to fruitful revelations. We can intuit a way only so far. The relling in unstable feedback and oscillations created by analogue delays, the flute's purity and consequent tape manipulation leads you to a threshold of discovery that can be both strangely familiar and startlingly new.



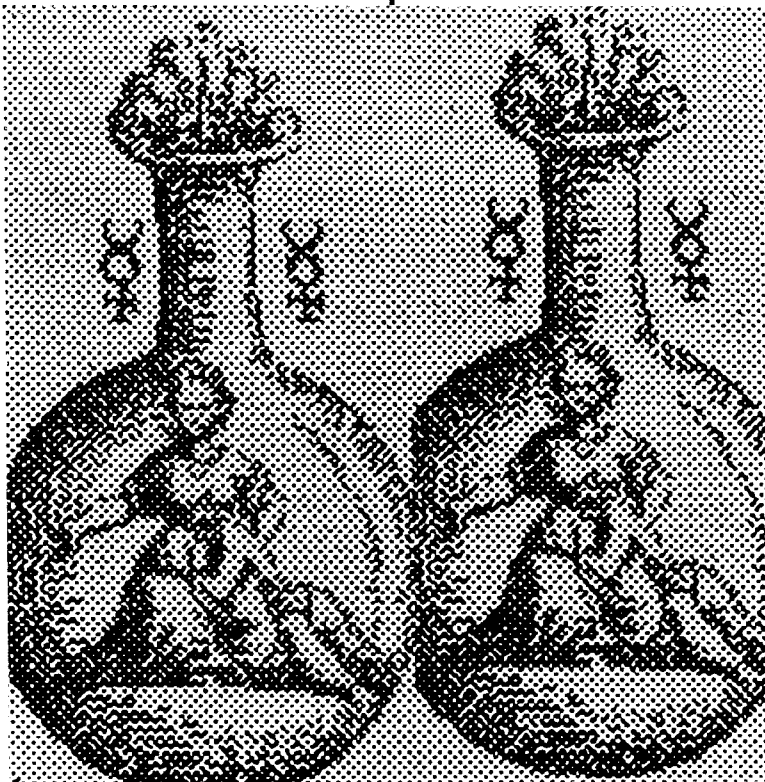
Neu Auto- Interview

Daffyd Roberts (Our Glassie Azoth) speaks...



The Weirdstone of Brisingamen was Alan Garner's first book. Have you read it, or are you familiar with his work? Are you interested in ancient stones, circles, burial mounds, monuments?

I fear we are horribly mundane ... I wish I'd read *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*. I remember seeing a repeat of *The Owl Service* and being as everyone is into that lovely early seventies middle class 'Englishy' TV series thing I



thought it was amazing ... even then not really the youngster I should have been, to be watching it. *The Mabinogion* is really important. Certainly Christianised; or really that's just a synonym for 'cleaned up' and whilst that might be a bad thing it's lazy of me to regurgitate that pat argument. Many of the stories contain some peculiar fragments; Ruth's the expert on it, she wrote a thesis about it. Have you read *Strandloper*? This is amazing, it ties together the antiquities of Cheshire with the lines of ritual in aboriginal thought.

It's hard when you come to think of influences; what looks good to say is an influence probably isn't really a valid influence. I think it's true with Our Glassie Azoth that we are very much involved with experiment, where can you go with a series of feedbacks. It's curious. Having been in contact with Norbert Schilling has made me try to think about theorising what we do. In itself that's an interesting proposition but it has not been how we have done things. It has rather been a shameless indulgence in noise ... a good noise ... but to my ears it's always been a patterned noise with harmonic resonances, and an orthodox harmonic structure.

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I studied music (unsuccessfully!) to A level. For a while I thought I was going to study music at college. But I saw sense, and didn't. I guess it's hard thinking about how you got to where you're at but I think that those years just before going to college were important. Certainly that's not to say that those subsequent haven't been considerably more important, which they have but in different ways. My own practical interests have always been in choral music and for quite some time I was in a semi-professional choir (the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic) which performed and broadcast with a professional orchestra, conducted by very well known conductors...Sir Charles Groves and Richard Hickox. At one stage I attended a masterclass with John Shirley Quirke. Certainly that's a time I look back on warmly. I was brought up in Liverpool, where there is a thriving Welsh community, and was encouraged to go to a lot of concerts at the Philharmonic Hall and in the Cathedrals as well as in other places. You had some insight into the interpretation and execution of some lovely classical pieces.

If music is alchemy, what is your touchstone?

If anything, the things that have influenced me most are choral music ... in particular Vaughan Williams's *Mass in G Minor* and his *Five Mystical Songs*. But I studied also a lot of atonal music by Berg and Schonberg and was enthusiastic about the former's violin concerto and *Wozzeck* in particular. And, unfortunately, weird stuff ... at least anything I used to think was weird, for example Jelly Roll Morton and his Red hot Chili peppers. It isn't weird but it became vital to me as a reaction away from what my friends were into, which included Chris De Burgh and Twisted Sister. By some route this took me to Screamin Jay Hawkins, to Miles Davis, and then to Steve Reich and Philip Glass. Steve Reich appeared at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall during a season of new music and that was really a happening time in my mind. Certainly then I was animated by Tippett, Walton, Frank Bridge, Ives and Stockhausen's - *Hymnus* is it? [*Hymnen*]. Glass was on a series on Channel Four about new American composers, which included Cage of course, but it was the shifting purity and timelessness-inducing trance of Glass's works, and pieces like *Einstein on the Beach* and *Akhnaten* that really grabbed me.

Another formative experience - I guess it must be as it stays in my mind always and I seem to be thinking about it in relation to your questions. It was a concert I attended at the Bluecoat of music made by those things, plastic corrugated tubes that you whirl about your head. The lights were blacked out and all these luminous arcs made these wailing sounds with a pulse and then as more of these arcs came in the pulses worked against each other. This was something else! More like the cinema...One of my other all-time happening concerts was hearing Shiv Karma Shuma - transcendent and everyone was so friendly. Transcendence is the most significant influence. Although these may be covert influences they are certainly not overt.

Thinking back now, that music with an interest in the - maybe slightly unusual - influenced me, and the music of OGA. It's strange how some records stay with you all the time. In 1979 I bought a celebration of the Radiophonic Workshop's music - its 21 years of life, now extinct of course. The music covered incidental pieces and sound effects from the mono times of the fifties thru to the (then modern) late seventies!! Apart from the rusty sounding modern synths of the late seventies the stand-out tracks for me were all the ones from the fifties (Desmond Briscoe) to the early seventies, and I must admit to being a big fan of all the music I have ever heard by Dudley Simpson. I know

nothing really about him, but I love it! It's often either very melodic (though unusual in its orchestration) or slurringly atonal. His music for the Mind of Evil and the SF programme *The Tomorrow People* being examples that instantly come to my mind. They're really haunting and melancholic too.

I'm saying most of this for myself as Ruth is out at work at the moment...her opinions might well be distinct from mine. At the moment we listen to a lot of Techno type stuff like the first couple of CDs by Astral Projection, or the stuff by Process on Flying Rhino. It's all obviously very contrived but there are some great sequences and sounds in there. For quite some time we've been getting records of stuff by Cabbage Head/Systems Project/Christian Vogel, stuff off the Tresor label and that's often heard in the house.

Since coming into contact with Plate Lunch they've directed me into hearing many new (to me) musics in particular, of course, Conrad Schnitzler. What I like best about *Rox* is the drifting apart of tones, vibrating close initially but sort of disintegrating this with the rasping compression of his later reverb-drenched percussive CDs...the piece I'm looking at now is from *Charred Machinery*. It's strange because this initially sounds almost hippyish with its bubbling synths almost like something from the Magic Mushroom Band's *Process of Illumination* and it's true that generally this CD is more 'commercial'. I don't think at any rate it has the impact of some of his other stuff, again though there are uneven cross rhythms. How we are trying to tackle this rework (which is intended for Plate Lunch's remix project of Schnitzler but may well not end up there) is by microfocusing in on those most definable moment of the track and reorchestrating them for our own instruments, which in this case will be feedback with mono synth and no acoustic instruments at all. We'll have to see how it goes.

You music is electro-acoustic, generated from acoustic instruments and feedback. Are there any clues encoded in the sounds as to their origins? Is the process of making music a transparent one? What led you to this approach?

The first tape we did as Our Glassie Azoth was this mix of works with flute, penny whistle, treated guitar, electronic drums and natural environmental sounds...birdsong etc. Because of limitations put on us since we've moved, the focus now tends to be more inward-looking. Thus there is hardly any acoustics on the new CD...its all straight off of one guitar and some effectbox induced looping feedback played slowly/quickly against itself...sometimes recorded and then rerecorded at a different pace so as to move even further away from the initial sound. Having said that, the two most recent things we did were entirely live in that the individual feedback tracks were mixed straight to DAT. The original hope was that these could provide either additional sound parts for a new piece using a computer or indeed assist in a live presentation. Both may happen at some stage but time necessitates that it's not now...hopefully we will put these two pieces...*Magician's Heavenly Chaos* out soon... OGA was only ever intended as a one off for Contaminated Produkts of Italy, but now we have 2 CDs out, a third ready, and some more individual tracks imminent. A one minute snippet on Thora Zine's compilation *Noise Kills Punk Dead*. An edit of *Chaos* appears on the reverse of the new Oggum seven inch, *Experimenting with an Amen*. Oggum is our label which basically puts out our own stuff now and then.



Shades of DARKNESS



This issue's Shades includes another CD from the great Charlemagne Palestine, and a contrasting study of two 'bassrumbling droner' classics from the glorious history of 20th century avant-garde composition. So all you Big Daddys...Enjoy!

Charlemagne Palestine, *Godbear* Amsterdam, Barooni c/o Staalplaat BAR 019

Charlemagne Palestine goes into hallucinogenic, shamanistic trances induced by his own live piano playing, wherein the stuffed Teddy Bears and other animals that he has draped around the huge grand piano start to assume their true shapes, and appear before him as Ancient Gods. His music is his own personal spiritual key, higher than prayer perhaps, an entry point to another world beyond the material. It probably isn't just the repetitive sounds (as in the famous two-note riff of *Strumming Music*) that do this, but the fact that he drives his own body to these limits of endurance. I'm sure any young UK dancer keyed into Ecstasy and 48-hour marathon workout club sessions could achieve a similar state (either through an excess of chemicals, loud noise or exhaustion - or all three in a delirious combination), but would they understand the devotional dimension? Charlemagne's Godbears are private voices whose presence we should not intrude on too carelessly, lest they vanish; yet if we bend an ear we might pick up the gist of their didactic sermons as they address their three-dimensional acolyte. For further suggestions in this area, I would look to chapters 7

and 14 of *Darkness Visible* by William Golding. Palestine doubted if the piano alone would be capable of unleashing these powers, until he heard what a Bosendorfer grand could do. Before that connection - one that could only be made by physical contact - he supposed the answer lay in electronic music, his beloved carillons he played with his feet in church, or even simply in loud volume. Then he hit those piano keys and depressed the pedals, and learned to live in the overtones. To my mind this is a better CD than the Italian one reviewed last issue - *Godbear* is almost Charlemagne's Greatest Hits, comprising 'Strumming Music', 'The Lower Depths' and 'Timbral Assault', described here as 'a re-evaluation of work from the seventies, recorded in the late eighties...Finally released in the late nineties, a long fuckin journey'. And with great sleeve art showing photos of King Teddy and Godbear. And excellent 'room presence' at loud volumes, so necessary for this music.

Iancu Dumitrescu, *Medium II for Kontrabass solo* [From an LP on] Editions RZ 1001 SDLP 015 (1987)

An answer piece to the flip side of this disc *Cogito, Medium II* is an utterly compelling bassrumbling droner, simultaneously soothingly relaxing and tense enough to tear your heart right through your sternum. Everything comes together so sublimely - an outstanding composition, an excellent performance by Fernando Grillo, a recording of

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utter clarity and a classical pressing. But why is this particular work so intriguing, so penetrating, the rumble on the eardrums stimulating the stirrings of some philosophical ideas in the brain?

Iancu Dumitrescu is a Romanian born composer, born in 1944 and one of the new school of that country who eschewed the vagaries of electronics or tape manipulation, to achieve the 'spectral sound' through using only acoustic instruments. He took this direction after about 1968, when the harsh political regime softened up a little and he had had the chance to hear the music of Weber and Schoenberg, up to that point a 'forbidden' activity. Although Dumitrescu had undertaken a fairly conventional classical training at school in Bucharest, he now felt inspired to take up a more personal music and followed this course into the 1970s. It began to firm up into a theory of music called 'Acousmatics'.

On the practical side, there was something of a lack of expensive equipment and general poverty in his home country, and few distracting influences from players skilled in the fields of say, rock or jazz music, genres which barely existed in Romania (perhaps they were too redolent of 'freedom'). So Dumitrescu couldn't enjoy the facilities of his contemporaries in France or Germany with their well-equipped tape studios for realising electronic or concrete compositions. But this was good for him, in a way; he reckons 'music demands a process of introversion, isolation and introspection'.

Working with the right players is important. Dumitrescu knows his sounds only really live through their interpreters, and realises the process of scoring can be somewhat unstable. He's been known to hear an ideal music in his dreams, the perfect sound, only to wake up heartbroken at the impossibility of scoring it. Yet the experience leaves a stamp on his psyche, something he can work with. A player who comes under his auspices is liable to end up re-educated, taught the fundamentals of music through study of the Pythagorean monochord, the possibilities of making music with a single vibrating string. And (as with the Morricone piece below), there's a primitive aspect which interests Dumitrescu - he wants to access the 'region of the psyche where there are nuances of the pre-cultural'.

Medium II also demonstrates a more metaphysical dimension to his composition theory. He can build a score around a very simple biological rhythm - the act of playing, and the pause which follows it. This activity/rest quotient is a constant; it's mirrored in another human function, the beating of the heart. As Dumitrescu contemplates, this can unfold to reveal another world of rhythm, invoking a nature system both cosmic and human. Number systems have a part too: Dumitrescu has intuitive theories about the 'inner structure' of numbers (inspired by his studies of the philosophical works of Husserl), and is convinced that the

pause is absolutely specific to the activity, they counter-balance in direct proportion to each other. This principle is used to arrive at a score which does indeed seem in harmony with powerful natural forces - and the method of realisation seems a lot more compassionate than Stockhausen arrogantly commanding his players to 'play with the rhythm of the universe'.

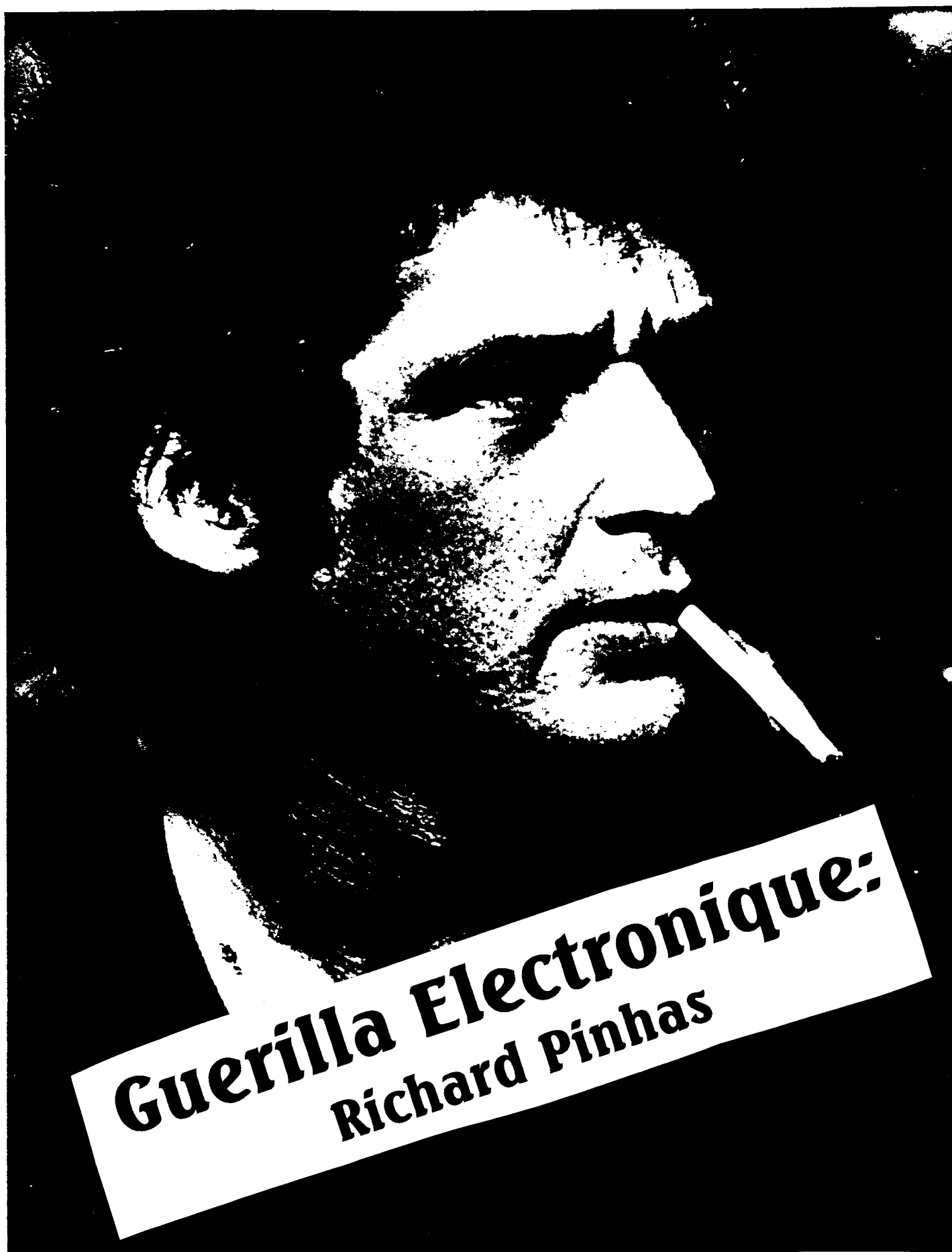


Ennio Morricone, *Totem Secondo* RCA Red Seal LP RL 31650 (1982)

Tucked away on this LP is *Totem Secondo*, another little-known bassrumbling classic - it's a fourteen minute instrumental scored for five bassoons and two double-bassoons. Is there any instrument in the orchestra that will yield up a more powerful, deep, rich and resonating bass note? Short of hiring a 25-stone rotund man with lungs made of vacuum cleaners, employing him to blow a church organ pipe like a penny whistle, I don't think so ... to hear this is to experience another strange and metaphysical ritual. It's the dawn of language, a clutch of shaggy Neanderthal brutes sitting round the fire

exchanging their flabby grunts and groans, then moving into some form of concord as they all sound together in long tones. Any anthropologist worth his salt will subscribe to my skewed view of evolution - that in terms of sounds emerging from the human mouth, music came first, language second. Take a trip to Yucca Flats in the *Totem Secondo* time-machine and you'll hear for yourself how true this is.

Totem Secondo was written in 1981; as title suggests, there's a predecessor piece to this - *Totem*, scored in 1974 for the same instruments plus percussion, but not officially published. Nonetheless a recording exists on a LP on General Records, a 'survey' of Morricone's more avant-garde work between 1969 and 1974. Morricone's always been keen to explore the possibilities afforded by minimal circumstances, and this is true to form. With rigour and keen discipline, he limits himself to bassoons, the better to explore this 'impasto of instrumental colours'. Sergio Miceli (sleevenote crib here) has likewise heard a ritual in these sounds, a mystique of physiology, even comparing a mid-section to 'the remembrance of a chorale'. He also admires the way this piece never falls into the 'grotesque' - presumably some philistines will hear nothing but a pack of farting gorillas and belching baboons, but leave them to their folly. Morricone - what a deity...the distinguished career of the Italian Maestro deserves more detailed treatement than I'm capable of, but suffice it to say the soundtrack work was but one part of his oeuvre. He even blew an improvising trumpet blast or two early on in his career, with the Gruppo di Improvazione Nuova in the heady days of 1960s experimentation. Anyhow, to hear these bassoons, look for this LP which is a split with *Gestazione*, no less a shimmering work of holy purity...



Guerilla Electronique:
Richard Pinhas

The Sound Projector Fourth Issue

by David Elliott

...Continuing from the last issue, where the brief career of 70s French outfit **Heldon** was introduced, time now to look at the solo exploits of founder and main man, Richard Pinhas.

In reality, Richard Pinhas and Heldon were so interlinked as to be very often indistinguishable. If late Heldon albums were the result of a robust band dynamic, the early albums had more of a solo feel about them; conversely, while Pinhas's late 70s solo efforts were indeed solo, his early 80s releases were very much a group effort. A dozen or so musicians drifted in and out of both group and 'solo' line-ups. The one constant was that Pinhas was always at the helm.

After five Heldon albums, Pinhas released his first solo, *Rhizosphere* (Cobra 1977). Whereas the guitar had been prominent on all the previous group albums, this LP was purely electronic (save for drums on side two). There are comparisons with some of Edgar Froese's more minimal moments, with the combination of understated synthesizer and sequencer. Recorded for the most part on 2-track, it showed a more reflective, romantic side of Pinhas than he'd previously let on. There were the usual dedications (to Gilles Deleuze and Philip Glass) but *Rhizosphere* is essentially the sound of Pinhas finding his own voice.

Chronolyse (Cobra 1979) was more of the same - short, sharp, stark sequences on side one with a long dirge on side two. It was actually recorded around the same time as *Rhizosphere* but not released until two years later. All the titles are from Frank Herbert's *Dune* and the album as a whole is 'dedicated to all SF freaks'. The Pinhas-science fiction link goes quite deep, with further namechecks for Philip K Dick; while author and friend Norman Spinrad even gets to sing on a later album.

Following the last Heldon album, Pinhas recorded the majestic *Iceland* (Polydor/Ramses / Pulse 1979). For many this was his finest hour. Huge, icy chords vie with jagged rhythms to produce a music that is both beautiful and eerie. The tension in the title suite is almost palpable as speakers struggle to cope with the music's fragile layers: one rpm slower or faster and the great slabs of sound start sliding out of key. On the other hand, 'Greenland' is Pinhas at his most romantic. A simple melody but eked out with real warmth. The album was originally released on Pinhas's own Ramses label through Polydor in France but was picked up by Pulse in the UK, the start of a short but intense relationship.

With UK interest on the up, Pinhas delivered the varied and vaguely commercial - for him - *East West* (Pulse 1981). Loosely based around the theme of cities, the album ranged from the darkly ambient (an oblique cover of Bowie's 'Sense of Doubt' no less) and beautifully reflective, to Heldon-style rollicking workouts and even what could just about pass as a pop single, 'West Side' (duly released as such). The usual suspects were recalled - Gauthier, Auger, Batard and Grunblatt - and together it made for an accessible ride. With Pinhas's good looks, a UK label, synthpop filling the charts, and the fact that the band could put on a storming live set, everything looked set for some major recognition. *East West* paved the way. And soon an encouraged Pinhas was back in the studio working on the follow-up.

L'Ethique (Pulse 1982) was again extremely varied, heavier and essentially less commercial. And somehow these three factors this time worked against him. His too-short showcase concert at The Venue in London didn't do him any favours

either. Whatever, no sooner had Pinhas's star risen than it divebombed...

... and for ten years he, effectively, 'disappeared'. There were rumours about poor health and that he'd taken up writing chamber music, but the more mundane truth was that he simply felt he had nothing more to say, and so ducked out of music altogether, returning instead to his first interest, philosophy... and, er, skydiving.

The early 90s wholesale re-release of his - and Heldon's - back catalogue on CD conspired to inspire Pinhas back into music. Live recordings (including a beautiful 26 minute polymoog piece called 'Wintermusic') were added as bonus tracks. Then finally, a decade after *L'Ethique*, out came a 'new' solo album, *DWW* [*Die wachsende Wüste* from Nietzsche, meaning *The Growing Desert*] (Cuneiform 1992). Actually the tracks date from as far back as 1983, through to 1992 reworkings of a couple of *Iceland* pieces. In any case, it was a surprisingly cohesive album and showed that Pinhas did have something to say. 'The Joe Chip Song' in four parts was particularly effective, even if his use of new (for him) digital equipment was elsewhere a tad bland and crude.

Pinhas was then invited to play - with John Livengood - at 1993's UK Electronica Festival in London. This not only produced a ferocious performance, blowing all the other acts out of the water, but resulted in an album, *Sally Cyborg* (Tangram 1994), again with Livengood. It was a mixed affair: very sample-heavy, cold and not dissimilar, in approach at least, to another-revived-Euro-70s-guitar-hero Manuel Gottsching's *Walkin' the Desert*. The rather pointless 'Cyborg Sally Song' was released as a single by the UK Amp label sometime later and needless to say did not chart.

Which brings us to *De l'Un et du Multiple* (Spalax 1996) and a full circle return to the more minimal 'systems' music of his first three albums. Certainly there is a heavy nod to Fripp and Eno, and it's all the better for it. Whilst not breaking any new ground, it does portray a thoughtful and restrained Pinhas, perhaps at peace with himself?

If I'm honest, I can't say any of his 90s releases have been overwhelming - though they definitely have their moments. Better to search out the earlier stuff, and if pressed to recommend one essential purchase, then it has to be *Iceland*. What next - a Heldon reunion?

Albums available on CD

***Rhizosphere* (Spalax 14237)**

***Chronolyse* (Cuneiform RUNE30)**

***Iceland* (Spalax 14236)**

***East West* (Cuneiform RUNE31)**

***L'Ethique* (Spalax 14238)**

***DWW* (Cuneiform RUNE40)**

***De l'Un et du Multiple* (Spalax 14994)**

With John Livengood:

***Cyborg Sally* (Tangram WM 852 015)**

(NB: This is not exhaustive; there are other collaborations, curios, a French-only compilation etc)

Thanks to Gary Scott for additional information

A collaboration, under the name *Ose*, with journalist & sometime musician Herve Picquart (plus stalwart Francois Auger on drums) continued the double theme of SF and sequencers.

The Mossbed Of Improvisation is KOSMISCHE

NO 1970S KOSMISCHE GEMS this ish sports fan. just a few items from the reissue barrel all courtesy of Captain Trip records. I'd hesitate to say that these are essential purchases, but form your own opinion as to the validity of these releases. One is given to understand that almost any musical item no matter how obscure, trivial, culturally insignificant or commercially unviable stands a chance of securing a Japanese reissue at some stage. This might not be a bad thing, but quite clearly what is sent to my postbox is only a tiny percentage of what's going on out there.

La! Neu? Zeeland (live '97) **Japan, Captain Trip CTCD-086 (1997)**

One from the veteran Neu / La Düsseldorf mainmain autorocker Klaus Dinger. Will he never give up? He's the only original member of either band represented here, with a pickup combo of friends and musos of capable mien, but rather less-than-genius status. The thin sound is the first disappointment to reach your ears; this item is seriously underproduced, lacking in the studio polish and sturdy sound we know Dinger's great LPs for. Each track sorely misses the solid underpinning of good circular riffs, good production (balance sounds very rough indeed) or even new ideas. The la-la chanson (often in French) of vocalist Victoria is the second drawback; it makes many tracks sound like Stereolab - ironic, is it not, given that UK band's penchant for Krautrock copycatism? That Dinger should come to this - a bit like Marlon Brando wishing to emulate Leonardo DiCaprio, or whatever vapid Hollywood toy-boy the media vampires have singled out as 'the new Brando'. I would like to support Klaus Dinger for his new work, nor have I any desire to live in the past - but this item just doesn't have the necessary energy, witness these rather tired-sounding, lacklustre guitar and keyboard parts. The best moments come from, firstly, what we could all bits of inspired chaos - where on track 2 reverb and feedback threaten to swamp everything else. And secondly from the spoken word and attempted singing parts of what I take to be one

of Dinger's aged relatives. Producing an album informed by a 'home movie' aesthetic appeals to me, even if the results aren't always great.

Thomas Dinger, Für Mich **Japan, Captain Trip CTCD-078 (1998)**

Enjoyable, but the process of entropy (or law of diminishing returns, perhaps) is once again rather in evidence. Thomas Dinger tried a solo stab here dating from whenever, out of his period with La Düsseldorf and brother Klaus. And it's the economy sized version on sale today, I fear. *Für Mich* is sadly a pale shadow of La Düsseldorf music, the same languid approach and sounds, but nowhere near as compelling. One is drawn (as with the above) to the more eccentric and silly moments, like the harmonium playing on track two which is deliberately corny and amateurish, presumably to satirise Schlager-music or some equally mindless German beer-swilling knees-up toon. Thomas Dinger does this with some affection however, and a good-naturedness that few English musicians could muster for such an occasion.

Tiere Der Nacht, Evergreens **Japan, Captain Trip CTCD-069 (1997)**

Tiere Der Nacht, Hot Stuff **Japan, Captain Trip CTCD-073 (1997)**

Tiere Der Nacht, Wolpertinger **Japan, Captain Trip CTCD-074 (1997)**

Three CDs worth of eccentric instrumental modern music, certainly not without its charm and powerful capability. Musically more in the improvisation vein than Kosmische capering, *Tiere Der Nacht* are Mani Neumeier who was founding father / drummer in the great Guru Guru, jamming it up with the Italian guitarist and electronic mangle-merchant Luigi Archetti. On *Evergreens*, the mix is bit stodgy and slow-moving. Each droney jam is filled with promise, but sometimes overlong - most of them overstay their welcome despite their moments of clarity. There's humour at least in the choice of instruments, including toy ray-guns and bizarre tinkly electronic doodling. Recorded in 1996.

Hot Stuff is bouncier and quirkier, the immediate frame of reference being Fred Frith / Chris Cutler duos, or related combos - in fact almost any cut here could be by Skeleton Crew. You could just connect this with a undercurrent of playfulness sometimes evinced by underground / experimental musicians - ie *don't take us too seriously folks*, and throwaway titles like 'Pink Panther for President' might just clinch the matter. There are lively renditions of non-existent folk dances, and rondellos of delicious scat-sung gibberish. Meaty and masculine, fixated on more 4/4 beats than the above but displaying



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imagination and versatility in the instrumentation, including tapes, sampled radio, trombone - and some fine steel drum / Gamelan work from Mani. Plus guest contributions from visiting vocalists Rupert Volz and Daniel Volkart, trombonist Shirley Hofman and sampler Hubl Greiner. Recorded in Germany in 1991. The best sleeve (crocodiles eating coloured balloons collage) of the three.

Wolpertinger was recorded same studios in 1993 is most immediately accessible of the three, the pair engaging with each other with the same Skelton Crew choppy rhythms but a far 'rockier' sound from the guitar (like a souped-up David Gilmour) and Mani Neumeier whooping and hollering from behind his drum kit in a truly demented mode. At least one foray into a calmer and more sober ambient drone is undercut with wacky echoed duck-calls (no doubt provided by Mani the Loon). Another track overwrites The Residents' 'Sinister Exaggerator' with Archetti's spacey choppy guitar riffs and an ominous deep-voiced Germanic rap by Mani; this one weirdly prefigures last year's *Space Explosion* in terms of its architectural space. This LP and *Hot Stuff* originally issued by RecRec in Switzerland.

S.Y.P.H., *PST!* and *S.Y.P.H* **Japan, Captain Trip CTCD-093 (1998)**

Two LP records by this band from 1980 and 1981 (their second and fourth releases) respectively on one handy CD reissue package. S.Y.P.H. were effectively a 'New Wave' German combo, at least active in the post-punk period, but amongst their Talking-Heads stridency there are traces of retrograde steps which become clearer as the CD progresses. Yes, it's a boon for all listeners who have played their Can records to death but find themselves screaming 'I Want More'. Here to comfort you all is very nearly a replica Can - even more so than Metabolist (reputed to be the English Can), with circular drumming, marching bass lines, Karoli-like guitar stabs, mumbled vocals. The clincher being that this was produced by Holger Czukay in Can's Inner Space studios. Czukay also plays on the record, contributing that distinctive rubbery bass-playing, equally fluid echoey horn blasts, some mickey-taking harmonica passages; and most tellingly his familiar post-production techniques of editing, sampling and tape-slowness interjections.

You could easily ignore all of this as a retrograde assembly-line product, but you'd be making a grave error. The performances are excellent - particularly successful are the two long tracks from the second LP, 'Nachbar' and 'Little Nemo' where they excell in the good improviser's ultimate aim - that is, leaving enough space for all the other musicians. That this may sometimes consist of nearly stopping dead while the drummer contributes his insistent pulsebeat is just



as acceptable (if not more so) than desiring to fill every space in the ether.

In a way Czukay (or his studio) is the star here. He makes each track an exciting sonic episode, packed with atmosphere, tension and dynamics. But he's working with raw material of a very high quality. Sometimes I feel S.Y.P.H. lack the eccentricity of our heroes Can, although you might find some of this desirable commodity in Harry Rag's bizarro-styled lyrics, the delicacy of delivery we associate with Damo Suzuki and indeed Malcolm Mooney seems to evade Rag - his belt-em-out approach is more akin to Eddie Tudorpole. Still, the band perform as a

watertight and efficient unit, derivative as their overall sound may be. S.Y.P.H. appeared on one track on *On The Way to the Peak of Normal*, again under the auspices of Czukay; perchance a cautious listener will wish to remind himself of their contribution to that glorious LP before splashing out for this nifty item. The more adventurous of you will, I trust, have already bought one.

*Captain Trip Records, 3-17-14 Minami-Koiwa,
Edogawa-Ku, Tokyo, Japan*

Damo Suzuki Band, *Vernissage* **Germany, DNW 007 (1998)**

And speaking of Damo, here's another Can-related item. Remember the elegance, grace and wonder of Damo Suzuki's vocals on 'Future Days', or the impenetrable dementia of 'I'm So Green'? Then stay with those records, and avoid this at all costs. It is incredibly boring, tedious, conventional funk-based rock music in no way distinguished by the tedious mutterings of Damo Suzuki, nor by the drumming of Jaki Liebzeit who inexplicably also turned up to the gig. Suzuki used to intrigue me on Can recordings because of his place in the mix, not up-front like a conventional rock singer, but used as another instrument. You couldn't really make out every bit of the lyrics and his eccentric observations seemed to promise high weirdness. Now he's become like any other singer, you can hear his lyrics and they're just plain banal. I'll concede that if you just like the sound of his voice (which is certainly distinctive), you won't be too disappointed. A resurrection of old Can hits 'Halleluwah' and 'Mushroom' doesn't really help matters. My golden idol is tarnished. The remainder of the pick-up band are horrendous, identikit Euro-stodge musicians - Dominik Von Seinger on guitars and Matthias Keul on keyboards; this was recorded live in Austria in 1990. There are threats of a seven-CD box set of live recordings by the Damo Suzuki band (1986-1990) on its way soon. For die-hard Can fans only, I'd suggest.

*Available in the UK through PINNACLE
DISTRIBUTION*



The Fifties have Bloodshot Ears!

A survey of NORTON RECORDS

by **Harley Richardson**

SURELY EVERYONE WITH AN INTEREST in popular music must realise that the classic rock'n'roll tunes which make the playlists of Radio 2 and Capital Gold bearable are only the tip of the iceberg. The concept of regional pop charts may be alien to us limey islanders, but while Presley, Berry, Vincent, Holly et al were making it big both at home and abroad it's worth remembering that there were hundreds if not thousands of rock'n'roll artistes in the US of A enjoying financial and creative success on a local scale. Others took full advantage of the musical liberation afforded them by pop music and made records too wild or way out even for the tastes of the time. The sheer number of great songs that fell by the wayside is born out by the seemingly endless stream of quality compilations released over the last fifteen years or so by labels such as Crypt, Atomic Passion and Flame, all of whom are dedicated to exhuming these lost, forgotten or never-discovered-in-the-first-place classics of rock'n'roll and associated genres like doo wop, country and western, rockabilly and surf.

Norton Records have distinguished themselves within this minor industry, their many releases characterised by attention to detail, top-rate graphic design and above all love of the material. The brains and brawn behind Norton and New York residents Billy Miller and Miriam Linna. You may have their excellent Missing Links series of Link Wray obscurities. Here's some gunk by a few of their lesser known acts...

Hasil Adkins, *The Wild Man* USA, Norton Records LP, NORTON 203

Hasil Adkins plays a reckless Bo Diddley-style rhythm on his guitar, often wildly out of tune and time. This man likes grating cheese! He's also a one-man band, usually accompanying himself on drums. Although the Haze has been recording since the fifties, it's only in the last few years that his wild and chaotic music has built a reputation and attracted fans like Keith Richards (allegedly). Norton and other labels have been re-releasing his original home

recordings and encouraging him into the studio for new clashes with recording technology such as this great mid-eighties effort.

As musical experiences go it's not easy on the ears. In fact, I defy anybody to sit down and devote their entire attention to this LP from start to finish. The studio sound is thinner and harsher than Adkins home-taped material and exacerbates the sameyness of most of his songs. Perhaps the studio lacks the warmth and texture that is captured by the indiscriminate mikes of cheap tape recorders? Whatever, different music requires different ways of listening. I've found it to be a great ironing record. As I concentrate on the task at hand, my desire for a melody or structure in my background music disappears, allowing the insistent high-speed chugga-chugga of Adkin's guitar to work its way into my head, I imagine myself on a thrilling steamtrain ride through the Nevada desert. Who says doing the chores need be dull?

There's backing on several numbers from Norton house band, the A-Bones. Band and man click together with a vengeance in the descriptively-titled 'Wild Wild Friday Night', the rhythm section pushing Hasil on and on as he uses every riff he knows. In the end there's nowhere left to go and everyone collapses in satisfied exhaustion. The extra presence of the Bones isn't always so welcome though. Miriam adds a drum beat to 'Chicken Flop' and it just seems to throw off the Haze's internal sense of rhythm.

If the stories are true, Adkins probably deserves the wild man tag. The girl he gropes on the tasteful sleeve photo would most likely concur. However, in true rock'n'roll tradition there's a soft side to his character and he bares it in two surprisingly candid ballads. The LP closes with the startling 'Turning Off a Memory' wherein Haze slows down the pace and intones mournfully over a circular blues lick in an intimate style reminiscent of late Velvets live material. This painfully romantic song of drunken despair may not be a Haze original but he sings it as if every word were his own. Take it as the chaser to Daniel Johnston's *1999* next time you need reminding that no matter how bad things are, there's someone else who's got it worse!

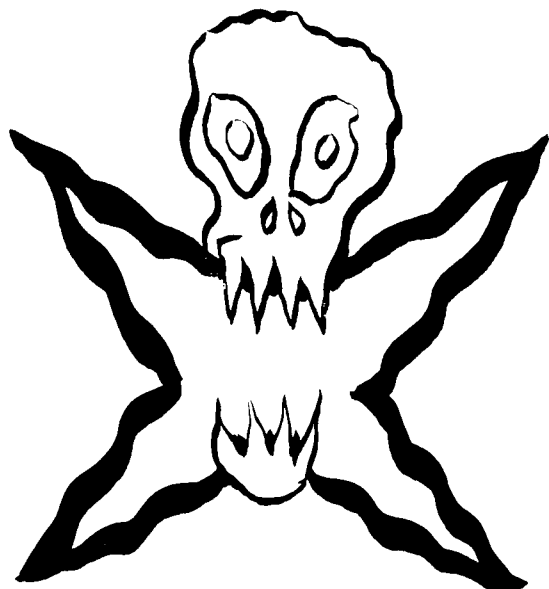
Jack Starr, *Born Petrified* Norton, NORTON 204

Another multi-talented individual! The man who wrote, directed and starred in movies like *Charlie Hong Kong Meets the Spider*, *I Am Dead*, and *World Wolf* was also a makeup artist, magician and rock'n'roll musician! Jack Starr was committed and driven to create, to the point of setting up a makeshift recording studio in his pantry. What sets him apart from your average rock'n'roll muso though is how he lets his varied interests creep into his music, turning otherwise straightforward romantic numbers into tunes which are just ever so slightly strange... consider some of his song titles ('My Love for You is Petrified', 'Constellation of a Fool', 'Godzilla we love you'). And respect to the guy for his correct pronunciation of the jolly green giant's name ('God-zeera'). And he could be astonishingly direct, with titles like 'Pain (Gimme Sympathy)'.

Starr is another Bo Diddley disciple, I reckon. Through most of the first side the playing is almost pure rhythm - who cares about melody, feel the excitement! By side two, he makes it to the '60's and learns a chord progression, developing a playing style which Miriam Linna accurately describes as 'intense, violent, frightening'. The nearest reference point is the attack and edge of Dave Davies's

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playing in 'Really Got Me', so you know this is good stuff! The collection is rounded out entertainingly with some bizarre and disorientating radio adverts for his Magic act as The Great Munzini. Multi-skilled rock'n'roll!



King Uszniewicz and His Uszniewictones, *Twistin' and Bowlin' with...* Norton Records LP, ED221

I've never been convinced that the Sex Pistols were the best people to peddle the line that you can make great music with zero musical ability. For a start they could actually play (Sid Vicious possibly excepted). Perhaps King Uszniewicz should have been leading the clarion call instead. Whilst Lydon and co were busy worrying the upstanding folk of England, King U and his gang were clearing the bowling alleys of Detroit with music of genuine ineptitude.

Let me get this straight. I'm no member of the 'so bad it's good' school of music appreciation, however I'm not ashamed to guarantee that you will laugh out loud as King U and his twelve-strong gang of losers massacre minor hits of the fifties. The U-Tones could actually play their instruments, but not necessarily together in the same room at the same time. Their haphazard playing throws up spectacular Half Japanese-type clashes of sounds and rhythm (although unlike Jad & co they didn't have the savvy to develop these mistakes into songs).

Their guitar lines are shadowed as far as possible by King U's brilliant and distinctive two-note sax-as-irritant style, which was stolen by Brentwood Lanes regular Bryan Ferry for 'Let's Get Together'. And sounding like a gang of flu-ridden drunks who have been jilted at the altar, the U-Tone

choir wail and moan their way through the songs, producing an overall effect like a hammer to Spector's Wall of Sound.

In band producer Cub Koda's sleeve notes Koda discusses his addiction to hearing the U-Tones ride roughshod over some of his favourite songs. Those of you who've know and love the Shaggs or 'When People Were Shorter's *Bobby* will appreciate what he means. King U's music makes you question just what it takes for music to be genuinely 'bad'.

It's not clear whether King U is the warped mind behind the Magic Band-like names given to the U-Tones (Logham Lurch Patterson, Roberto Naileye, Philly Joe-Dog Lower, etc) or whether it is actually the King himself in the spectacles and red suit on the handsome sleeve. Suffice it to say that with *Twistin' and Bowlin'* the unthinkable has happened in music. Two other volumes exist. You are warned!

Wade Curtiss and the Rhythm Rockers, *Puddy Cat/Real Cool* Norton 45-051 7" (1996)

***Bright Lights/Hurricane* Norton 45-058 7" (1997)**

'Say man, where you take all these chicks they all wants to go out with you?' Well, it's not often I have cause to ponder this question, but Wade Curtiss (rhymes with hiss!) has the answer: 'Down where the Bright Lights shine!'. Norton put out forty-fives too when they feel inclined, and this pair come in yummy licorice shades of red and blue vinyl. The aforementioned 'Bright Lights' is a classic example of how



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hackneyed rock'n'roll chord sequences can be kicked back into life by an imaginative arrangement, as the song is propelled forward by its chicken plucking lead guitar line. NY State wrestler Dixie Dee gets a guest credit on the cover so I guess he's the owner of the trembling vocal chords which deliver the song in an endearingly velvety fashion reminiscent of the Big O.

Which'd probably make Wade the gravel voiced charmer who growls and whoops 'Mama-Mee-Ow-Mow!' through the band's bird answer track. 'Puddy Cat' doesn't add much to The Trashmen's legacy (see *The Big Itch*, below), but has a fun second-half where the music stops and Wade is joined by a 'cat' for a bout of out-there caterwauling. Wade (if it's he who play the guitar in the band) is clearly a bit of a virtuoso on his instrument and the two rockabilly b-sides give him the chance to wig out in great pre-psychedelic style. Add to that an idiosyncratic reverb-smothered production and you've got two licorice-coloured platters worth a place in anybody's collection.

***Bloodshot! : The Gaitly Records Story* Volumes 1 & 2**

Norton Records LPs, ED-235 and ED-236

Gaitly Records, 'America's Most Primitive Label', was born in 1958 when a young David Hersk set up a makeshift recording studio in the basement of his parents' Minneapolis house. For a small fee he would record a band and release the results, and in the process he helped several combos make their mark on the Minnesota scene. Most of the forty-fives released on Gaitly before it shut up shop in '64 are rare as blimey now but Norton have kindly brought together the bulk of them, together with some previously unissued tracks, on these two volumes.

Norton's proclamation that Gaitly was 'America's most primitive label' is surely open to question, as is Hersk's contradictory claim that Gaitly discs were 'recorded in high fidelity'. It's not clear from *Bloodshot's* sleeve notes whether Hersk took all comers under his wing (although he did have the good taste to send a young Bob Dylan packing), or if he exercised any quality control or if indeed there was any musical vision steering his work. Whether by circumstance or design, the Gaitly sound was raw, ragged and above all 'low-fi'.

Vol.1 opens with the amazing 'Marlene' by The Sonics (no relation to the bunch who brought us 'Strychnine'). Two notes are insistently hammered out by sax and guitar and used as the launch pad for some seriously demented slide guitar solos. A few tracks later and the Flames conjure up middle-eastern style r'n'b in 'Arabian Caravan'. The String Kings bring three guitars to bear on the Peter Gunn riff in 'The Bash' (they claim they got there before Henry Mancini) and their hangover tribute 'Bloodshot' provides the series with its name. The muddy Gaitly sound will have you believing a piano can sound like a guitar for the duration of the Del Ricosi excellent and sinister boogie woogie number 'Voodoo'. As for the rest of the disc, I can't say that every track sets my pulse a-racing, several are run-of-the-mill rock'n'rollers and the doo-wop numbers in particular are pretty damn lame.

Look to Vol.2 for a greater share of Gaitly corkers. The Crown Teens' 'Easy Rhythm' has a strolling beat, handclaps and a lovely warm and reverberating guitar sound. Curtis and the Galaxies take us into easy listening territory the Gaitly way with their mysteriously-named instrumental 'Theme from A Fireplace', the main melody being picked out

in unison on both acoustic guitar and sax (a first!). Jerry Roberts and the Toppers dish up an exotic crooner, 'Change Your Mind'. Gaitly house band the Glenrays prove they're no mere session musicians during 'Hey Little Willie': a wild guitar solo is given extra gusto by weird and off-the-cuff harp-like glissandos from the piano player. The Miller-Olsen Combo combine goofball political commentary with top swing on 'Fidel Castro Rock'. The Jades do a mean vocals/slide guitar call-and-response Chuck Berry-style. Howie Butler and the Reflections' 'Have a Good Time' may be Buddy Holly's 'It's So Easy' with hokier lyrics but it's a sweet version of a great song nevertheless. The Glenrays return on the final track with the bizarre piano instro 'Haunted by Repetition'. If Joe Meek had followed 'I Hear a New World' with a jungle rhythms meets haunted house record, the muddy recording and idiosyncratic, slightly out-of-tune piano melody of this track would have made it a perfect contribution.

So Volume 2 is a must buy, but what the heck, buy Volume 1 too, for the Sonics' 'Marlene' if nothing else! Slam it on your stereo, turn up the volume and crack open a bottle of whisky and some beers and I guarantee that in the morning you'll have Bloodshot ears!

***The Bobby Fuller Four, I Fought the Law* Repertoire CD, REP 4279-WY**

Not a Norton release, but you'll find many of these tracks duplicated on Norton Fuller releases. The Clash fans amongst you will recognise Bobby Fuller as the man from whom Strummer & Co copied 'I Fought the Law'. That song was actually written by Sonny Boy Curtis of the Crickets and while a great tune, it pales next to the energy of some of Fuller's originals. Amongst a bunch of sparky variations on standard rockers stand out three sparkling gems - 'Let Her Dance', 'Another Sad and Lonely Night' and 'Never to Be Forgotten'. The lyrics may be about jealousy, betrayal and loneliness but the tone of the music is totally positive, especially in the uplifting and strident Byrds-like guitar solos fashioned from simple ringing chords.

The Four aren't the mean-sounding bunch that the title of their biggest hit might lead you to believe - more like popster gentlemen with balls, as they effortlessly intertwine fuzz and reverb effects into their compositions. Fuller was an obsessive Buddy Holly fan and keen to avoid showing any sign of being influenced by The Beatles. However I do detect some early Fab Fourness in the bare bones of his tunes, in particular the ability to get more than should be possible out of simple song structures. Just listen to 'Never to Be Forgotten' as it rotates through its verse-chorus-bridge structure but continually seems to be shifting up a gear of intensity.

You'll find many of these tracks on pretty much any Bobby Fuller compilation. This particular budget price selection pads out the band's first studio LP with a healthy 14 tracks which showcase the band's versatility. 'Baby My Heart' is worth the asking price alone as the band throw towering vocal harmonies over a fuzz guitar lick worthy of Link Wray. Hear this and let the Bobby Fuller Four sing a ray of sunshine into your soul.

the miracle is true

Just For Kicks...

ANYONE WHO'S READ *INCREDIBLY STRANGE Music Vol. 1* will appreciate that Billy and Miriam can talk intelligently and coherently about their fave subject, rocking records. In an excellent pair of interviews, both the Norton gang and The Cramps put forward persuasive arguments in favour of trash music being taken seriously. Norton was originally an offshoot of *Kicks Magazine*, Billy and Miriam's way of spreading the rock'n'roll gospel via the medium of paper. Seven issues have appeared so far, featuring the likes of Sparkle Moore, Arch Hall Jr, Esquerita, Ron Haydock and The Iguanas (Iggy's first band) amongst many many others. As the history of most rock'n'roll records isn't exactly well documented, it's to Billy and Miriam's credit that they'll track down their subjects (most of whom are no longer in the business) and give them plenty of space to tell their own story (several issues of *Kicks* weigh in at a hefty hundred pages).

Kicks is a total pleasure to read and an object lesson in how record reviews can be creative endeavours in themselves. Billy and Miriam clearly love words as well as music and seem to have an inexhaustible supply of superlatives and metaphors at their disposal. *Kicks* should be required reading for anyone interested in the English language. (You won't be impressed though if you're offended by dropped t's or the word *cool*.) Several hundred records get the thumbs up in each issue and such is the force of Billy and Miriam's enthusiasm that they convince you that every damn one of them is worth buying! (Before buying *Kicks* you might ask yourself if your wallet is big enough to stand the consequences - mine wasn't!). *Kicks* looks great too, crammed full of found adverts, band photos, gig photos, film posters and record sleeves, in other words the kind of stuff that will be familiar to you from *Psychotronic Video*, *Ungawa* et al. But what the heck, bring me more of this shit!

And if you want to sample the kind of stuff covering in *Kicks*, a good place to start would be...

The Big Itch

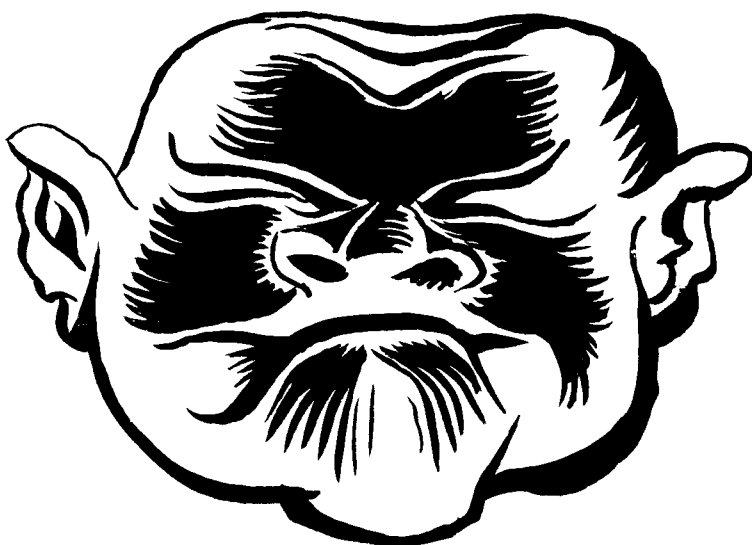
USA, Mr. Manicotti LP MM328

This superb series of compilations on Norton affiliate Mr Manicotti Records purports to cover 'America's Rich Musical Heritage'. Take one look at the boxer-short-wearing teens dancing on the cover of Volume One, and you'll know exactly the type of culture that Mr Manicotti considers worthy.

Volume One kicks off with the bird dance beat. You may think you know nothing of this phenomenon, but do you remember the 'Bird Bird ... Bird is the Word!' hook from those chicken sauce adverts that graced our screens a few years back? That's the Bird! The Trashmen's 'Surfin' Bird' was a take on The Rivingtons' 'Papa Oom Mow Mow', a minor doo-wop hit in the early sixties. The Trashmen adapted the song, repeating the gravelly hook ad infinitum over a two-note fuzz guitar riff, and creating a scarily infectious ditty which makes 'Louie Louie' seem sophisticated.

The simplicity of Papa/the Bird meant that it could fit snugly into all kinds of musical structures. Thus when The

Trashmen made the Bird a national hit in the early sixties, hundreds of bands rushed to get in on the craze and a zillion variations were born, ten of which are included here. The prospect of this is a lot more fun than it sounds (cf. 'The Best of Louie Louie'), mainly because the bands use wildly different approaches. Bobby Lee Trammell goofs out, The Dinks incorporate pseudo-Japanese lyrics, and The Elite make a drawn out Fall-style bass-and-drums number. Such is the scale of the craze that even The Trashmen



**Papa Oom Mow
Mow!**

themselves felt it politic to produce several further variations. By the eighties though the Bird had disappeared almost entirely from western mainstream culture. It was left to bands like The Cramps to champion the cause of the Bird, garnering interest from magazines like *Psychotronic Video* who claimed (possibly correctly) that there was a real Papa Oom Mow Mow.

To complement the Bird side, side two is a 'Turd' side, although there's not a stinker amongst this collection of curiosities. Here's just three reasons why this record is great: B-movie star Arch Hall Jnr's shows he's a mean singer too and his 'Konga Joe' is accompanied by the snappiest use of Tarzan-movie-style tribal rhythms you'll hear this side of a Hollywood sound studio. In Larry and the Loafers' astonishing 'Panama City Blues' the guitarist sets up an off-kilter guitar riff to rival that of 'Ticket to Ride', builds up



the tension over a couple of verses, then blows the Fab Four away with just two chords in one of my all-time favourite guitar solos. Andy and the Classics provide a superb sax signature tune for Wilma Flintstone which I suggest didn't have Hanna-Barbera approval. Judging by its foreboding tone Andy saw Fred as firmly under the thumb, and there is a slinky guitar solo which suggests that Wilma had a sultry side not made explicit in the show! Yabba Dabba Doo!

Volume 2: A Memorial to Joe E. Ross **Mr. Manicotti LP MM340**

Joe E. Ross is best known for his starring role as Gunther Toody in classic '60s sitcom *Car 54 Where Are You?*. He also made occasional appearances in Bilko's platoon as gullible Mess Sergeant Ritzik and the sharp eared amongst you will have will have spotted his vocal talents in recent breakfast-time airings of *Hong Kong Phooey* and other Hanna-Barbera cartoons. Anyways, back in his heyday, some entrepreneur must have thought Ross's twitchy persona and gravel-toned delivery were a recipe for sure-fire novelty record success. They shoved Joe into the studio and recruited a bunch of kid rejects from The Brady Bunch to join in handclaps and backing grunts. Novelty records are much maligned but this one sure rocks!

This craziness leads neatly into The Rock-Fellers' 'Orange Peel' with its citrus-based spin on romantic rejection ('you loved me for a day then threw me away... like an orange peel'), with a wild sax solo and backing singers making their contributions from the far end of a wind tunnel. Other highlights are The Metropolitans with their complex surf guitar line (clearly only just within the capability of their

guitar player), a c&w version of 'A Hard Day's Night' and the return of the Bird in Brother Zee & The Decades' superb sax and-doo-wop treatment. 'Tween the tracks are painfully-awfully excerpts from a small-town talent contest, treated with suitable disrespect by the Mr Manicotti mixing desk.

Volume 3 **Mr. Manicotti LP** **MM341**

Back in the days of Chubby Checker and the Locomotion just about any human or animal activity was likely to have a dance named after it. Flintstones aficionados will know and love Rock Roll's classic 'Bedrock Twist' which gets a welcome vinyl outing here, as do The Trance, the Temper

Tantrum, the Mexican Stretch and other steps you won't be taught at your town hall's '60's dance class. There's linguistic and vocal invention a-plenty on vol.3 - who says the fifties weren't sophisticated? An out of control accapella navy band tackle the Bird. Wayne Sherwood does the 'Moon Step Twist' accompanied by funky ghostly backing vocals. Mad Mike and the Maniacs jangle their whammy bar to the rhythm of coital grunts through the whole of 'Quarter to Four'. The Fantastic Emanons celebrate stupidity with 'Duh', a neat take on the Louie Louie riff. The Dinks are back from volume 1, this time peppering their fake-Jap gibberish and hyperactive organ with sunny guitar licks. Vancie Flowers gives a south of the border flavour to a great country'n'western number, although her accent is about as authentically Mexican as Old El Paso Tacos. Rex Johnson manages to make a catchy hook of the word 'discombobulated'. And any time you want to clear a party of pc pals, put on ultra-offensive T Valentine's 'Lucille Are You A Lesbian?', a rare Big Itch visit to the seventies (judging by the crummy funk bass).

Volume 4 **Mr. Manicotti LP MM343**

Vol 4 takes off part-way into side 2 with the bursts of righteous handclapping in The Spinners' 'Surfin' Monkey'. Next you find yourself stranded in hillbilly country as Tom Reeves expresses his 'Primitive Love' using some very curious animal-based similes. Then it's back to a happening downtown club for the Playboys' 'Mope de mope', a standard uptempo number with unusual chord changes and soulful wailing. I'm sure someone put speed in The Surfsiders'

The Sound Projector Fourth Issue

coffee just before they recorded their everything-but-the-kitchen-sink doowop treatment of Beach Boys classic 'When I grow up'. Marty Roberts & His Nightriders' 'Baby' is 'Rock Around the Clock' with discordant slide guitar and the sound of Homer Simpson smooching up to Marge at the end of their first date. Between tracks there's excerpts from a Vox 'teach yourself to play guitar' record which gives us 'Louie Louie' in various forms of de-construction and sounding great in all of them. And check out the Mr Manicotti discography on the back cover with its hilarious list of unlikely sounding (and coincidentally mostly out-of-print) LPs by Big Itch stars.

Volume 5

Mr. Manicotti LP MM344

The pickings are getting thinner by this stage of the series, but there's still a few gems to be had. 'Babylon Twist Party' opens affairs neatly with more reverb than your doctor would recommend. Robin & the Batmen square-dance and yodel along to the caped crusader's CV ('I can make the Riddler listen, plus I won't accept your pay'). This is about as true to the Batman legend as Link Wray's tribute and equally as funny. The Ramrocks do a Dick Dale job on a sexy Arabian melody then go one further culture-vulture-wise by turning it into an Eastern European drinking song. The Transylvania Twist is the Monster Mash with peppy girl backing vocals. Finally there's social commentary care of Bill Royal who considers a peculiar trio of vices ('Caffeine - Nicotine - Gasoline - what's us human's gonna do?') and Sgt Ralph Yore who delivers a pro-Vietnam (!) folk guitar protest song.

Volume 6 - is highly likely.

Where's the trash kept, ma?

You'll find most of the records mentioned above at any record store with a 'trash' or 'garage' section. Reckless Records in Camden and Intoxica in Portobello are reliable London stockists. *Kicks* 6 and 7 still show up from time to time, if you find any earlier issues, let me know!

Norton also distribute trash by other labels. Send them an IRC for their entertaining catalogue which contains all the garage and psyche-punk records, posters and books you could want, plus until another issue of *Kicks* appears. A true mind-blower!

And if you can't get enough of ex-Suicide press agent Miriam's free-flowing style of writing, you can get her opinions on mid-century paperback erotica in two issues of her *Smut Peddler* zine.

Norton Records, PO Box 646, Cooper Station, New York, NY 10003, USA

nortonrec@aol.com

<http://members.aol.com/nortonrec/norton.html>

these 12

these 6

these 12/6 (extra crackling)

these tel: 0171 587 5349 fax: 0171 582 5278

112 brook drive london se11 4tq england

Immerse : sound(e)scapes, IMM 003 (1997)

Edited by Mathew F Riley and Leigh Neville.

pp 0169-0252, ISSN 1359-7825

It's a magazine...the design is the first thing I noticed, with lots of bizarre layouts, black space (as opposed to white space which used to be trendy back when *The Face* was in the ascendant) and some articles set in near-unreadable 6pt type. It has many able contributors. They like modern electronic music and they also like strange phenomena, and consider themselves experts in both fields. Nobody dare challenge them on either point I suspect, due to the self-assured and well-informed character of their terse, knowing record reviews. It's not always clear to me if they actually enjoy the music they review, whether any of it's worth buying or even what it sounds like; but it's clear they know an awful lot about it. Each writer is well up on the comparatively short history of musics associated with beats - House, Hardcore, Techno, ambient, electronica, and works almost exclusively from a late 1980s historical base-line. There are interviews, with Burned Friedmann - an important player in the German electronica scene just now, working under the brilliant name NonPlace Urban Field. A real NonPlace is another symptom of 20th century life, a sort of no-man's land resulting from a series of unco-ordinated decisions by town planners. Also interviewed - the rather smug and shallow Bowery Electric, who are terribly pleased with creating their own 'beats' and talk of little else; and the enterprising owners of the Japan Overseas label.

The other dimension is represented by interviews with people associated with 'weirdness' - a term the editors would probably hate. Conspiracy theorists, science fiction writers, alternative historians, and people so conversant with using the Internet and World-Wide Web that their very faces have turned into Pentium chips. Philip J Klass is a controversial UFOlogist, debunking myths behind the cult of Alien abduction; Kenn Thomas runs the Steamshovel Press, a subversive nexus for conspiracy theories. Myself, I enjoyed an interview with Christopher Priest - he's the quite good UK sci-fi writer who turned in *Fugue for a Darkening Island*, a book later used as a song title by Dr Mix and the Remix I think it was. But that's because he's about the only voice here talking about doing something creative, which I can understand. A lot of the rest I find alienating - it's talking about something I don't understand, and for some reason it fails to connect with me - but that doesn't mean it's wrong. The editors have a severe problem with *The X-Files* needless to say, but where I simply turn it off these days because it's so boring and the dialogue is so banal, they get cross because they want to see the subjects treated seriously - and not in a populist way, which demeans and detracts from the serious issues at stake. Be that as it be, this is one heck of a smart looking (if at times a little unapproachable) professionally edited and presented package.

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